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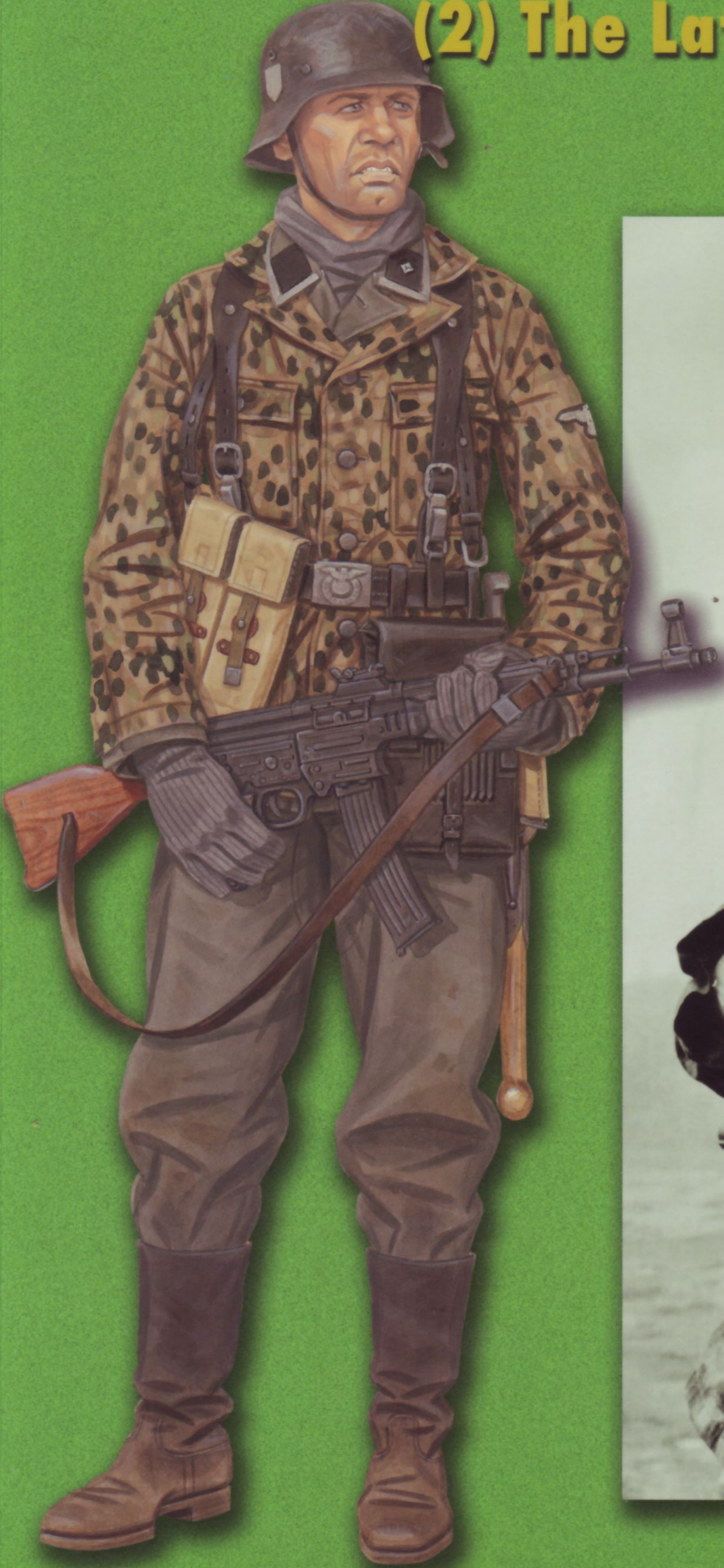
Waffen-SS at War

(2) The Late Years 1943-1944

Robert Michulec



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(2) The Late Years 1943-1944

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Introduction

The year 1943 was the turning point of the Second World War in Europe. On the Eastern Front, Stalingrad fell on 2 February. In May, Axis forces in North Africa surrendered; shortly afterwards the Allies invaded Sicily and then Italy, forcing Mussolini's fascist government from the war. The Battle of the Kursk salient in early July, demonstrated the power of the Soviet defense, while breaking the back of the German Panzertruppen. At sea, the Battle for the Atlantic finally swings in favor of the Allies, allowing supplies to be sent to the Soviets and for the build-up to the invasion of Western Europe. On 27 January 1944, the siege of Leningrad is broken. The summer of 1944 would see the German armies on the Ostfront reeling westward with the opening of the Soviet's "Operation Bagration" on 22 June. The summer of 1944 also saw the long-awaited "Second Front" opened with the Anglo-American invasion of France at Normandy on June 6 (Operation Overlord), followed by the invasion of Southern France (Operation Dragoon/Anvil) on 15 August. From then onwards, it would simply be a matter of months before Hitler's "Thousand Year Reich" would meet its bloody end.

No Waffen-SS units fought in North Africa or were trapped in Stalingrad, but the increasingly growing number of Waffen-SS divisions found themselves committed on all other fronts and battles. In the early days of the war the new Waffen-SS combat units were considered amateurish, unprofessional, and difficult to control by the Army, which had operational command of the un-tried units. In the spring of 1943 there were only 11 Waffen-SS divisions; new divisions were rapidly raised as fresh manpower sources opened up to the Waffen-SS.

Germans conscripted into the three armed services of the Wehrmacht could not be commandeered by the SS, unless they volunteered, so the SS needed to find additional manpower sources (later in the war, this was no longer the case as Luftwaffe and Kriegsmarine personnel found themselves transferred wholesale to SS units). In 1943 hundreds of thousands of "Volksdeutsche" (ethnic Germans) living mainly in Hungary, Romania and areas which were formerly part of Poland, were conscripted. At the same time the "Germanic" peoples of Norway, Denmark, the Netherlands, and Flanders were recruited. These men believed the Nazi propaganda, which said that the real purpose of the German war of conquest was to defend Europe against the "Red Menace" of Communism. Non-Germanic peoples were eventually recruited in growing numbers, including numbers of French and Italians. In the east, large numbers of nationalist or ant-communist Ukrainians, Belorussians, and Russians were recruited. It is significant that, contrary to every other occupied nation from the Atlantic to the Urals, no ethnic Poles or Greeks volunteered to form SS units.

More SS units were formed from the Baltic states of Latvia, Lithuania and Estonia, while various ethnic or religious groups in Yugoslavia, including Muslims, were also employed. Many of these later formations were unreliable, having been coerced or otherwise duped into joining the Waffen-SS; mutinies occurred where German officers were murdered. Other formations proved loyal to the end, such as the Frenchmen who aided in the futile final defense of Berlin. Many of these ethnic troops were used for security and anti-partisan duties in the Balkans and elsewhere behind the Ostfront (such as the 1943 and 1944 uprisings in Warsaw, Poland), where age-old ethnic tensions were exploited to the fullest by some astute Germans. In 1944 some non-German units (usually termed "legions") that had been raised by the Army were transferred to the Waffen-SS.

There were also several nationalities that formed small SS units. These included the Indische Freiwilligen Legion (made up of nationalists from India and others who had been captured while serving under the British, in North Africa), Russian Cossacks (who later formed the XV.SS-Kosaken-Kavallerie-Korps, of two divisions). Other nationalities within the Soviet Union, such as the peoples of Turkestan, Azerbaijan, the Crimea and the Volga Tatars were formed into a unit known as "Osttürkischer Waffenverband der SS".

Waffen-SS officers, for the most part, lacked higher levels of military training. For example, the Waffen-SS did not possess its own general staff school. The typical Waffen-SS officers had to learn their combat leadership skills the hard way, in battle, often at a high cost both to their men and themselves. Some opportunistic senior Army officers transferred to the Waffen-SS as the war progressed and the political importance of the Waffen-SS grew. Other Army officers were transferred to higher Waffen-SS staffs to provide the necessary military expertise. Officers and NCOs from police units were also assigned to the Waffen-SS, as were Army NCOs, in order to impart essential combat and technical skills. The Waffen-SS eventually established cadet schools for junior officers, NCOs, and specialized branch schools. The latter trained Panzer, Panzergrenadier, Kavallerie, Artillerie, Pionier, and Nachrichten (signals) troops in their specific duties.

A total of 38 Waffen-SS divisions were raised during the war, along with several brigades and smaller units. Some of the later divisions never fully developed and were actually of brigade strength or smaller in size; many possessed only two infantry regiments. Higher Waffen-SS formations were organized in mid-1943 in the form of SS-Korps; these grew in number with eventually up to 18 SS-Panzer-, Armee-, and Gebirgkorps raised, though some of the later formations existed only on paper. In late 1944 and early 1945, four Waffen-SS army-level commands were formed: 6.SS-Panzerarmee (used in the Ardennes Offensive), Heeresgruppe

Weichsel, Heeresgruppe Oberrhein, and Armeegruppe Steiner (a rag-tag formation tasked with saving Berlin at the war's end). While these formations were commanded by Waffen-SS officers, they were more akin to being joint staffs with a considerable number of Army officers on hand. Waffen-SS and Army units were intermingled in these formations.

Waffen-SS divisions went through numerous designation and honorific name changes, finally being "numbered" in October of 1943. Some changed their ethnic makeup, while other re-organizations were common. For example, existing Panzergrenadier divisions were commonly upgraded to full Panzer division status. In June 1944, several of the SS-Freiwilligen (volunteer) divisions were re-designated Waffen-Grenadier-Division der SS.

At the end of 1943 there were almost 247,000 men in the Waffen-SS. By May of 1945, at the war's end, there were approximately 800,000 men in the Waffen-SS. By the end of the war the following Waffen-SS divisions had been raised, with their final designations listed below.

1.SS-Panzer-Division "Leibstandarte-SS Adolf Hitler"
2.SS-Panzer-Division "Das Reich"
3.SS-Panzer-Division "Totenkopf"
4.SS-Polizei-Panzergrenadier-Division
5.SS-Panzer-Division "Wiking"
6.SS-Gebirgs-Division "Nord"
7.SS-Freiwilligen-Gebirgs-Division "Prinz Eugen"
8.SS-Kavallerie-Division "Florian Geyer"
9.SS-Panzer-Division "Hohenstaufen"
10.SS-Panzer-Division "Frundsberg"
11.SS-Freiwilligen-Panzergrenadier-Division "Nordland"
12.SS-Panzer-Division "Hitlerjugend"
13.Waffen-Gebirgs-Division der SS "Handschar" (kroatische Nr.1)
14.Waffen-Grenadier-Division der SS (ukrainische Nr.2)
15.Waffen-Grenadier-Division der SS (lettische Nr.1)
16.SS-Panzergrenadier-Division "Reichsführer-SS"
17.SS-Panzergrenadier-Division "Götz Von Berlichingen"
18.SS-Freiwilligen-Panzergrenadier-Division "Horst Wessel"
19.Waffen-Grenadier-Division der SS (lettische Nr.2)
20.Waffen-Grenadier-Division der SS (estnische Nr.1)
21.Waffen-Gebirgs-Division der SS "Skanderbeg" (albanische Nr.1)
22.SS-Freiwilligen-Kavallerie-Division "Maria Theresia"
23.Waffen-Gebirgs-Division der SS "Kama" (kroatische Nr.2)*
23.SS-Freiwilligen-Panzergrenadier-Division "Nederland" (niederländische Nr.1)
24.Waffen-Gebirgs (Karstjager) Division der SS
25.Waffen-Grenadier-Division der SS "Hunyadi" (ungarische Nr.1)
26.Waffen-Grenadier-Division der SS (ungarische Nr.2)
27.SS-Freiwilligen-Grenadier-Division "Langemarck"
28.SS-Freiwilligen-Grenadier-Division "Wallonien"
29.Waffen-Grenadier-Division der SS (russische Nr.1) **
29.Waffen-Grenadier-Division der SS (italienische Nr.1)
30.Waffen-Grenadier-Division der SS (russische Nr.2)
31.SS-Freiwilligen-Grenadier-Division
32.SS-Freiwilligen-Grenadier-Division "30 Januar"
33.Waffen-Grenadier-Division der SS "Charlemagne" (französische Nr.1)
34.SS-Freiwilligen-Grenadier-Division "Landstorm Nederland"
35.SS-Und-Polizei-Grenadier-Division
36.Waffen-Grenadier-Division der SS
37.SS-Freiwilligen-Kavallerie-Division "Lutzow"
38.SS-Grenadier-Division "Nibelungen"

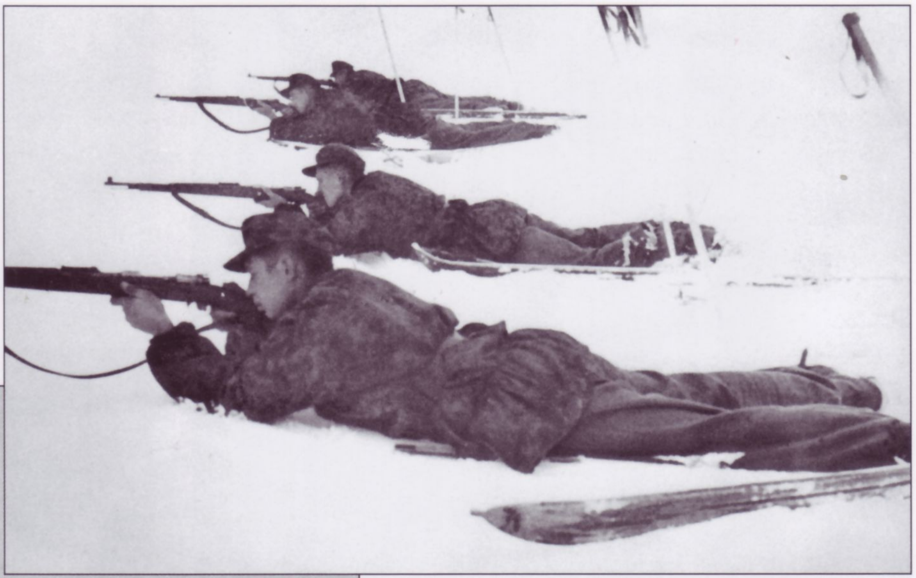
*23.Waffen-Gebirgs-Division der SS "Kama" (kroatische Nr.2), was a very short-lived unit, which was disbanded before entering combat. Its number was given to the Netherlands SS division in February of 1945.

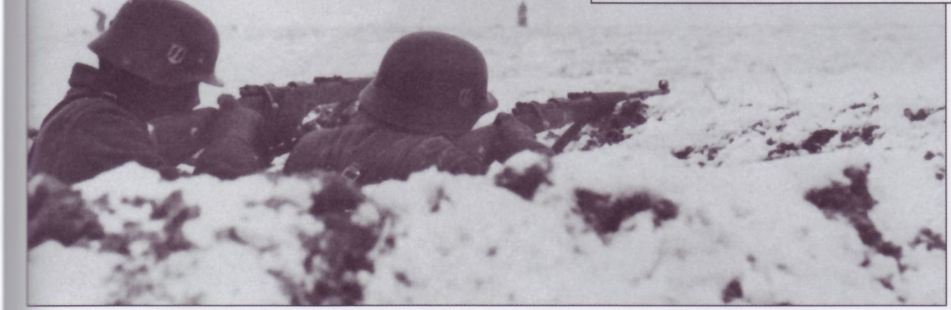
**29.Waffen-Grenadier-Division der SS (russische Nr.1), also known as the infamous "Kaminski Brigade", was disbanded after excesses committed during the 1944 Warsaw Home Army Uprising. As a result, its commander, Bronislav Kaminski and several of his top officers were executed on the orders of SS-Obergruppenführer Erich von dem Bach-Zelewski. The division's number was given to the Italian SS division in March of 1945. One source states that the unit may have never received this designation at all.

Definition of Unit Terms

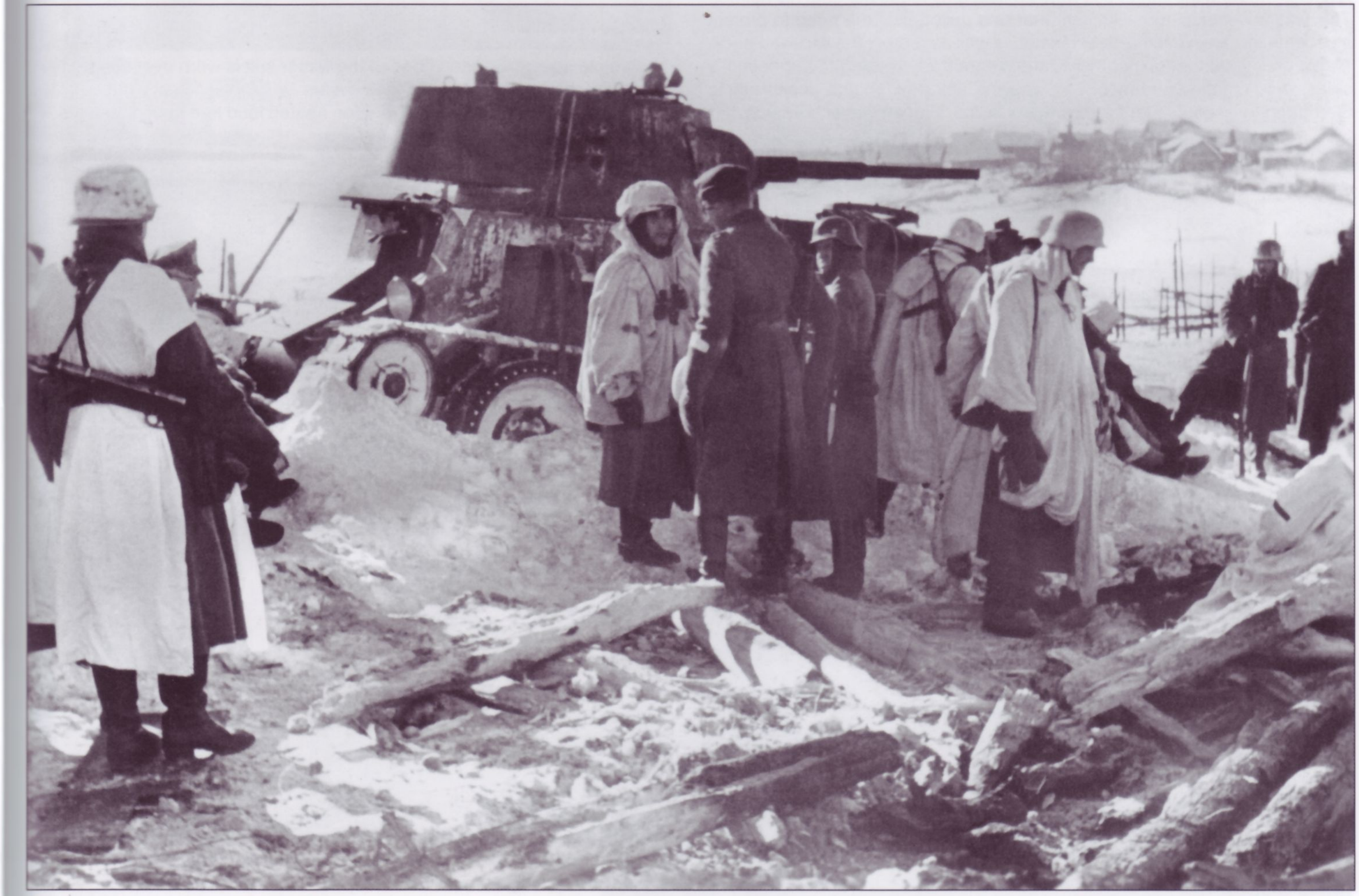
German	**English**
albanische	Albanian
Armee	Army
estnische	Estonian
französische	French
Freiwilligen	Volunteer
galizische	Galizien
Gebirgs	Mountain
Grenadier	Grenadier (infantry)
indische	Indian
italienische	Italian
Kavallerie	Cavalry
Korps	Corps
kroatische	Croatian
lettische	Latvian
niederländische	Netherlands
Nr. (Nummer)	No. (number)
Panzer	Armored
Panzergrenadier	Armored Grenadier (armored infantry)
Polizei	Police
russische	Russian
ungarische	Hungarian
Waffen-SS	Armed SS

Ski troops of SS-Gebirgs-Division "Nord" undertake shooting practice during cross-country ski training, January 1943. Skis and ski poles were painted white for camouflage, but the undersides of the skies were left unpainted to allow waxing.

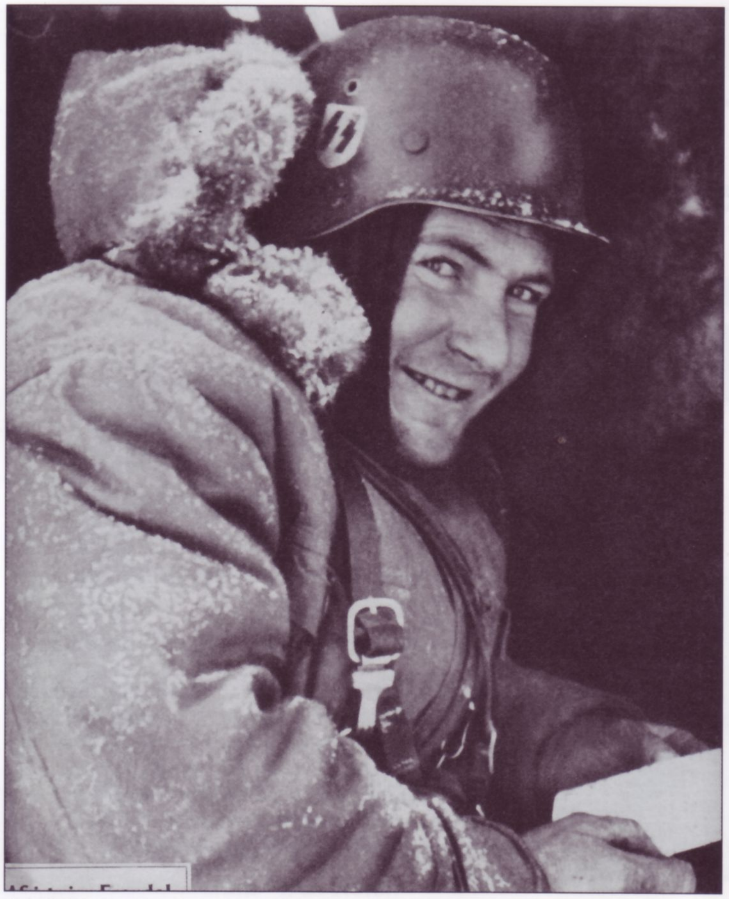




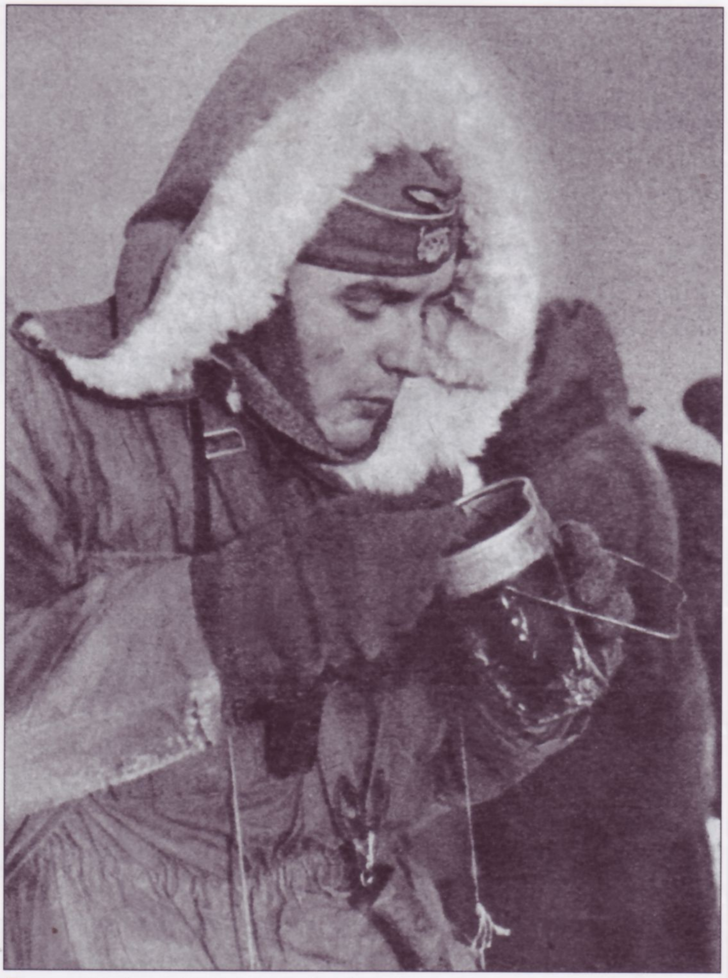
The standard German two-man "Schützenloch" (firing, or rifleman's hole) was nicknamed a "Wolfsgrabhügel" (wolf's barrow), analogous to the US Army term "foxhole". In open areas on the Russian steppes, the parapet was kept low or the spoil removed altogther to make the position difficult to locate. These soldiers may be members of 8.SS-Kavallerie-Division "Florian Geyer".



On the outskirts of a hillside village a group of soldiers await the order to advance clustered around a knocked out 45mm gun-armed BT-8 light tank (Bystrochodnij Tank = fast tank). Some 7,000 BT-8s were built between 1932 and 1941. They saw their last use at Leningrad in 1943. Many of the troops wear locally made snow shirts (Schneehemden) and whitewashed steel helmets.

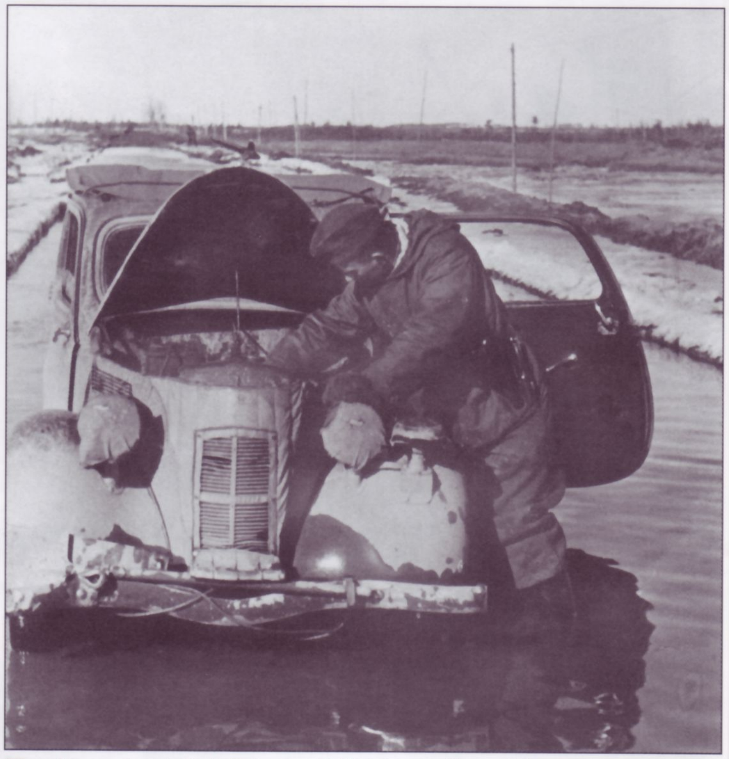


A soldier wearing the winter suit wears a field gray toque beneath his helmet. This was a wool-knit tube-like item that was pulled over the head to protect it beneath the un-insulated steel helmet as well as protect the exposed neck. It also prevented the tops of the wearer's ears from freezing to the helmet's sides, a common occurrence. This and the next two photos depict ethnic Germans (Volksdeutsche) from Hungary in the "Florian Geyer" Division.



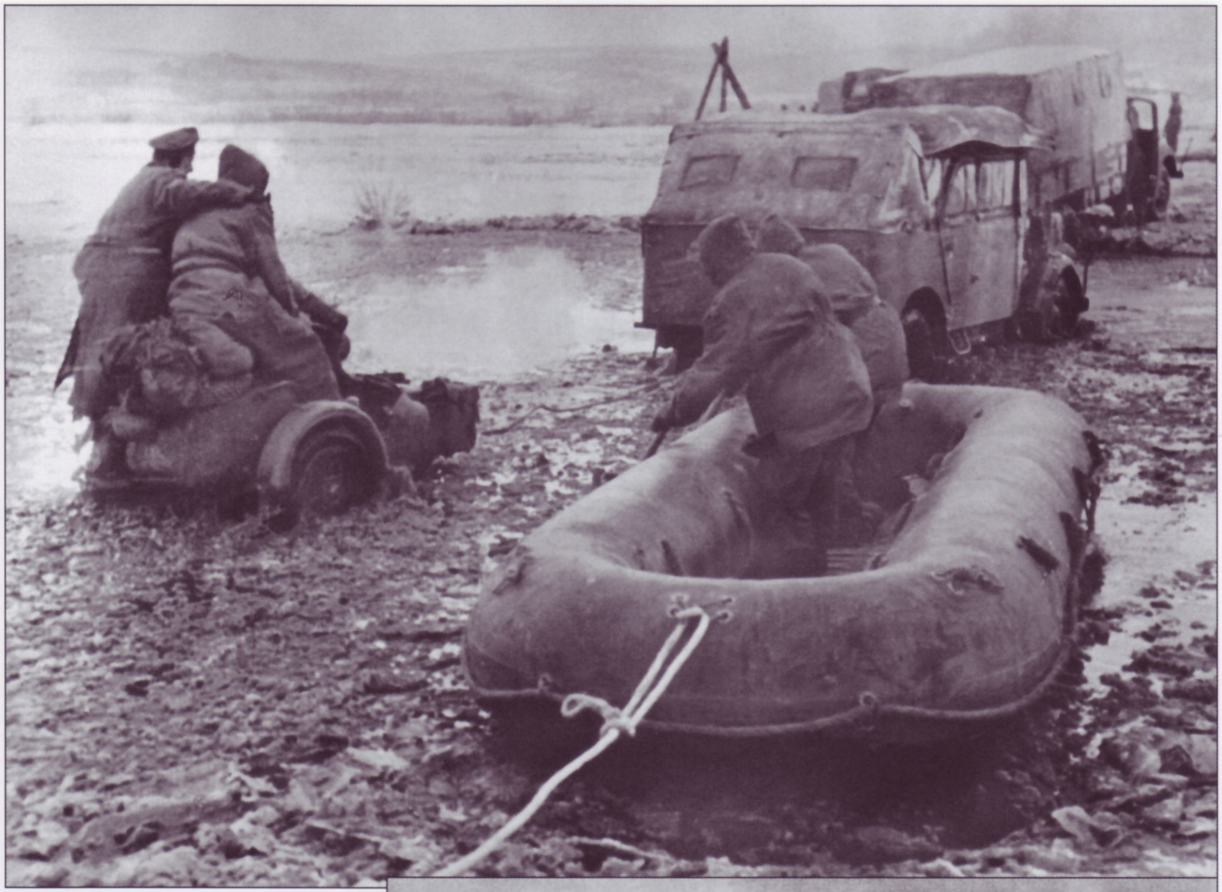
The ample sheepskin-lined hood of the winter suit is worn over this soldier's field cap, beneath which he also wears a "Kopfschützer" (toque). The sheepskin could be white or black. Even heated food had to be eaten quickly from the mess kit as it would soon freeze.

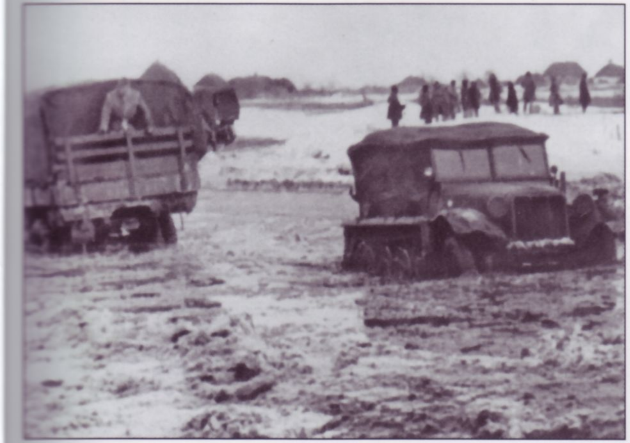
A smiling soldier gratefully opens a food parcel from home. Like soldiers everywhere, he will no doubt share this with his comrades. Food parcels were a rare occurrence on the Ostfront as they were usually restricted because of the lack of space in trains moving supplies to the front.



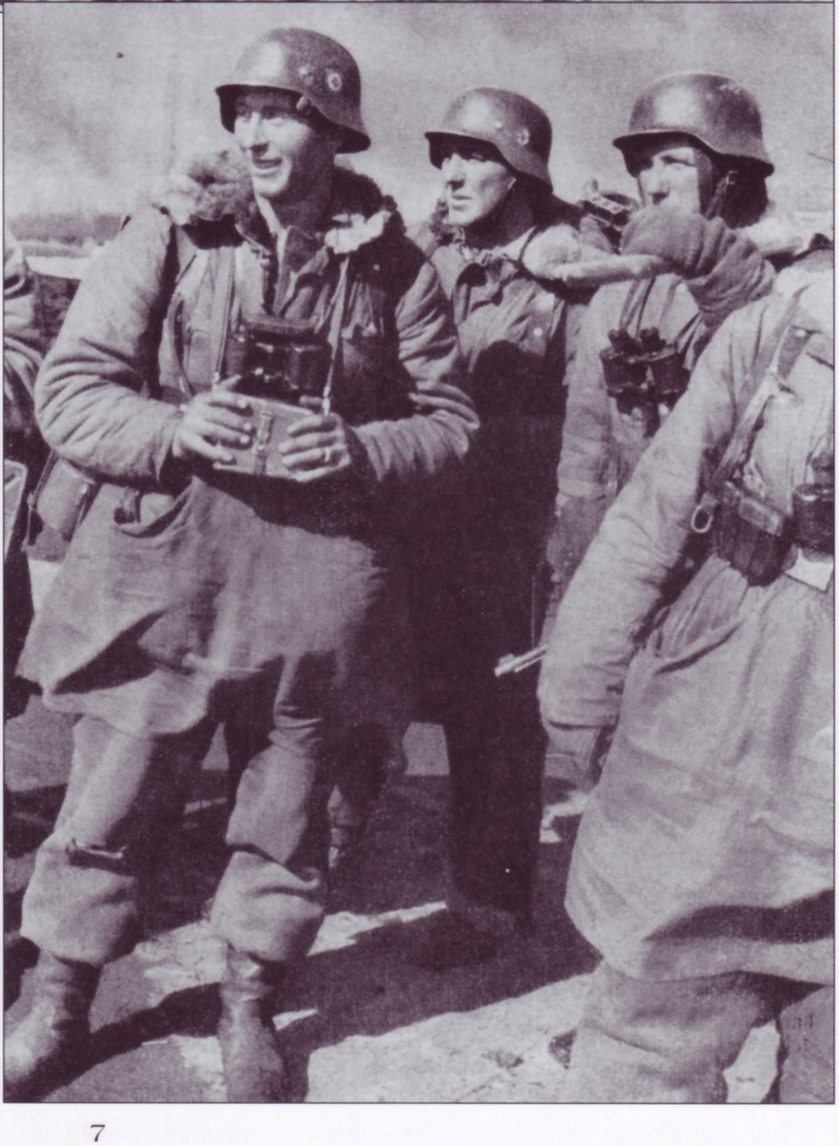
The driver of a stalled "Totenkopf" Division staff car tinkers with the engine during the spring thaw, March 1943. The staff car's weather-beaten whitewash paint has deteriorated. Melting snow caused roads to become inundated, while low areas, especially those bordering rivers and streams became impassable miniature lakes.

A pontoon raft is pulled across terrain that has literally become a sea of mud. Note the heavy field car towing a motorcycle with sidecar combination. In many cases, motorcycles were unusable, so motorcycle rifle and reconnaissance units on the Ostfront were often provided with light scout cars.

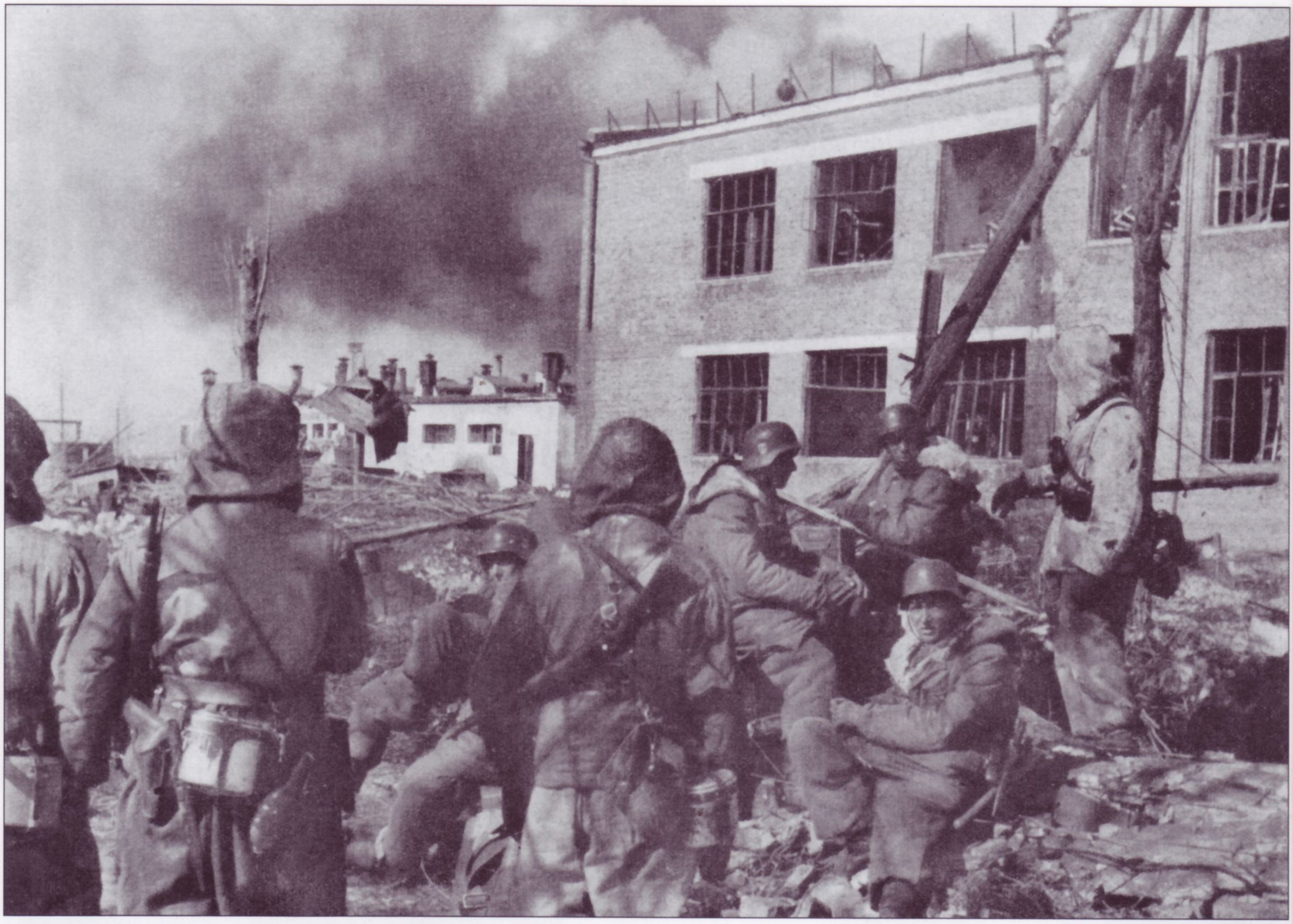




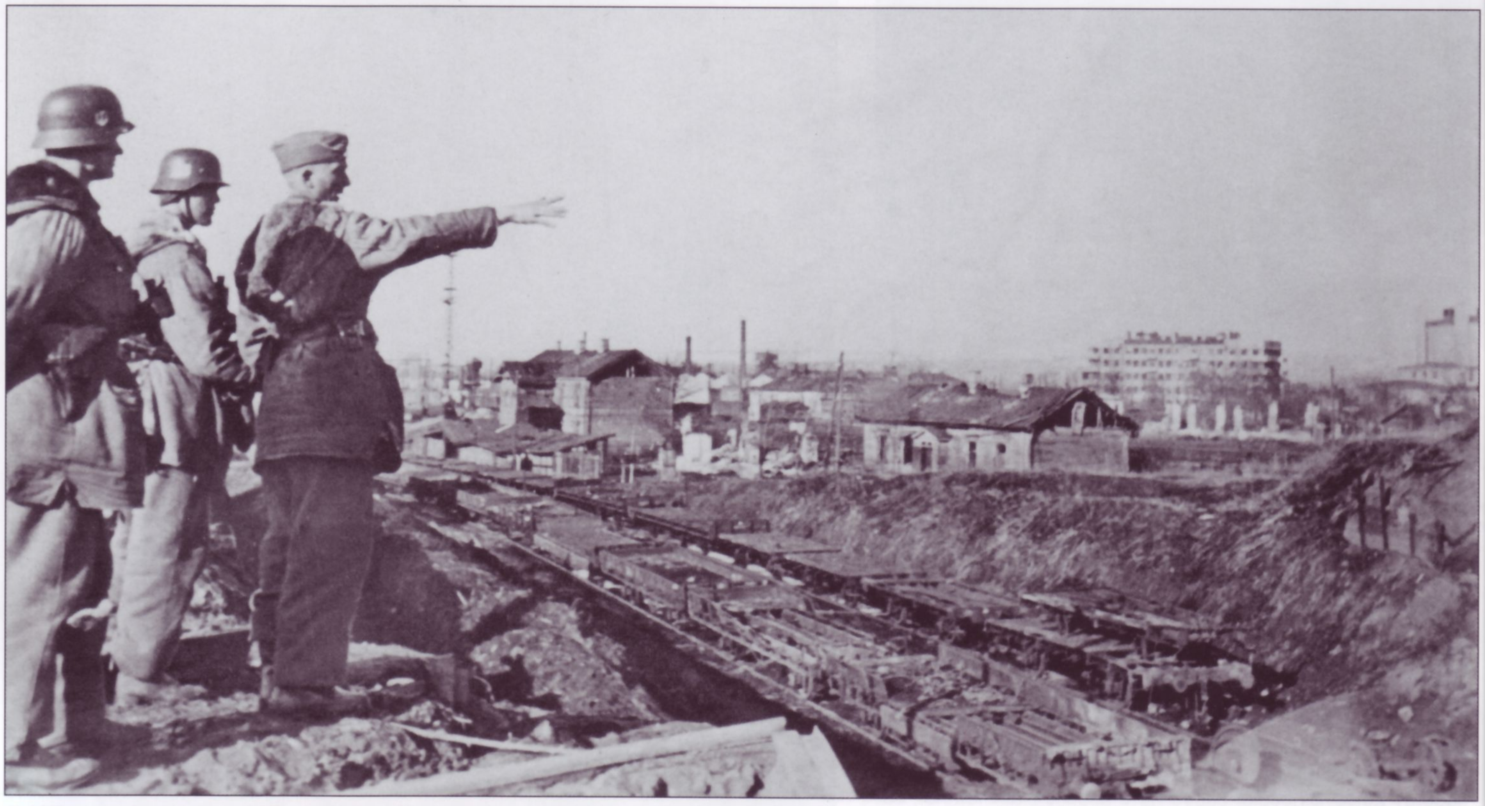
A "Totenkopf" Division leichter Zugkraftwagen Sd.Kfz.10 light halftrack forces its way up a river-like road near Kharkov, March 1943. Besides the thawing snow, the intermittent early spring rains would add to the flooding, turning roads and tracks into seas of deep mud. In such conditions, halftracks and full-tracked supply vehicles were invaluable.



Wearing sheepskin-lined winter suits, "LAH" officers watch their unit advance into Kharkov. The most commonly used binoculars were the 6x30 universal binoculars (Einheits-Doppelfernrohr) made by Zeiss. Binocular cases were usually black leather, but black Bakelite was also used. They were occasionally whitewashed in the winter.



"LAH" assault troops clear a factory area in Kharkov. They wear insulated winter suits and limited equipment, a benefit of being able to carry much of their gear in their organic unit transport since this is a motorized unit.



"LAH" troops look out over Kharkov's bombed railroad yard, which is strewn with wrecked and burned-out rolling stock. They wear the insulated winter suit of gray-green color. The amount of additional clothing worn beneath the suits is demonstrated by their bulky appearance.

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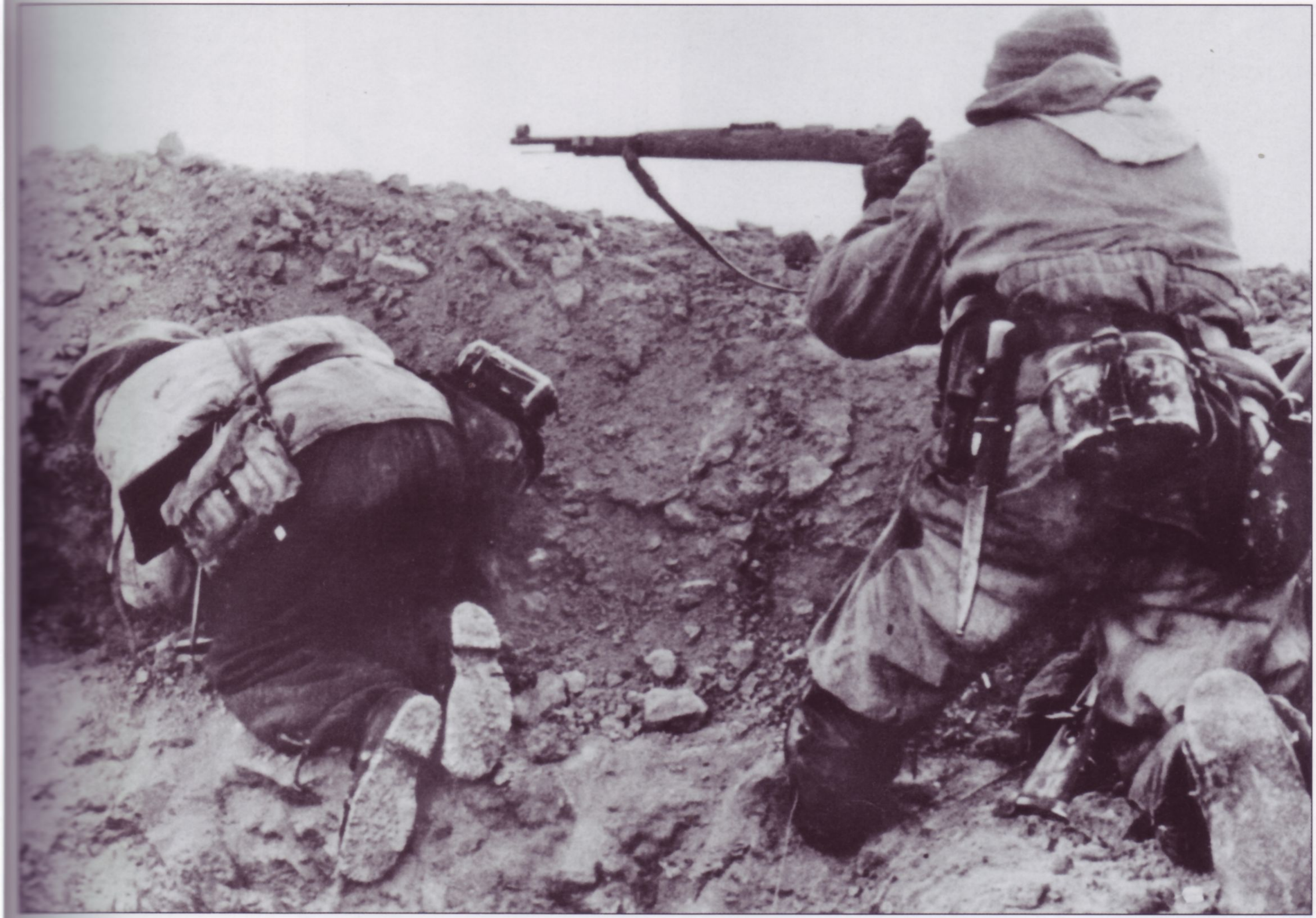
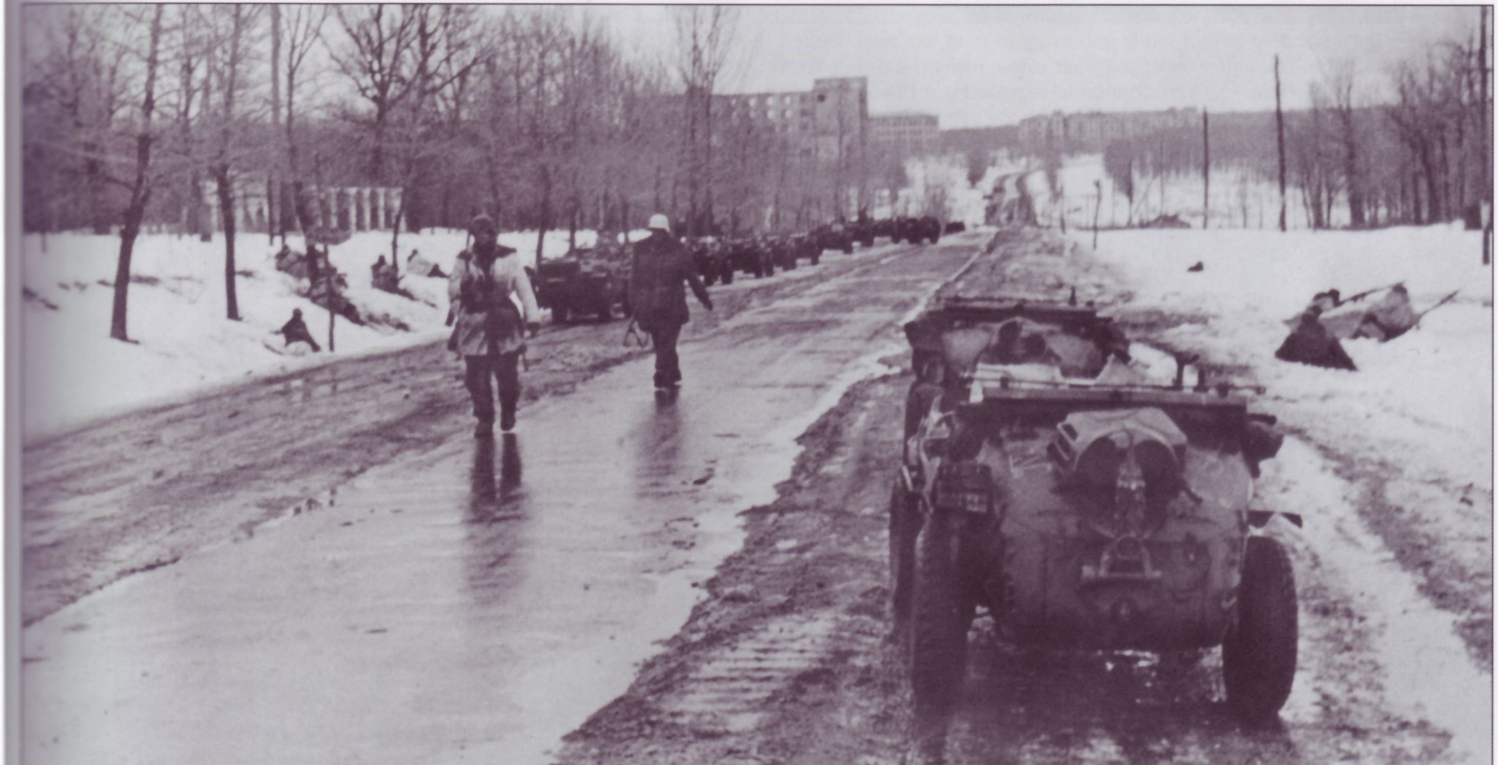
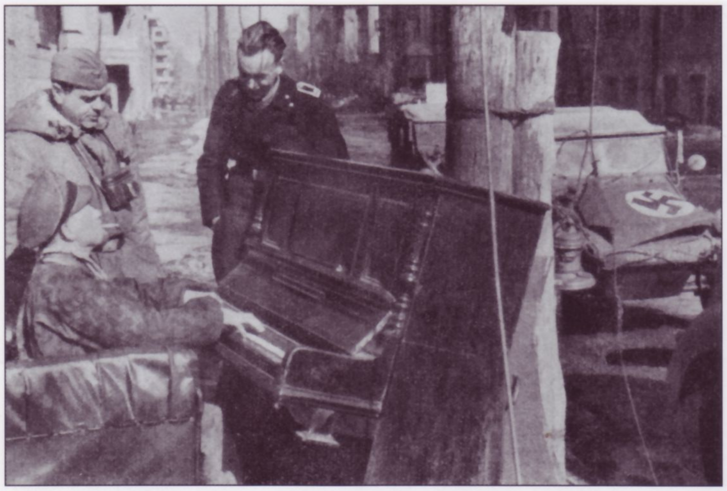


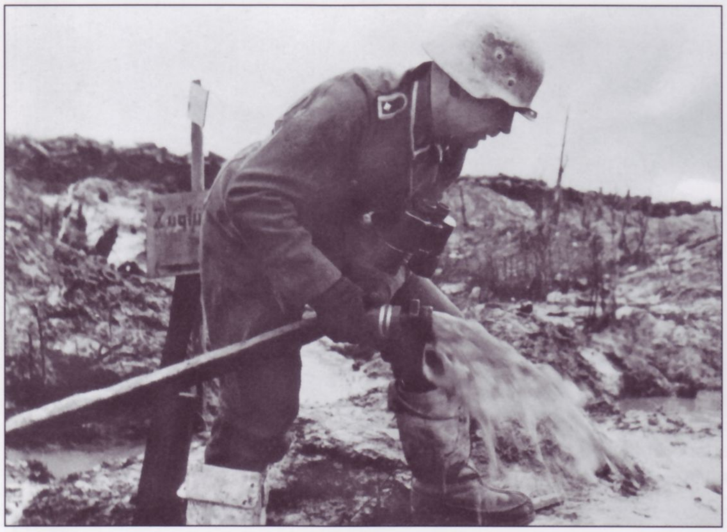
This rifleman wears an Army-style reversible winter suit with the mouse-gray side out. His web gear includes a bread bag, rolled shelter-quarter, canteen, mess kit, and S84/98 bayonet. The thick inner layers of the suit actually helped support his web gear and precluded the need for support straps ("Y" straps). The man to his left appears to have been hit. He is wearing his jacket with the white side out.



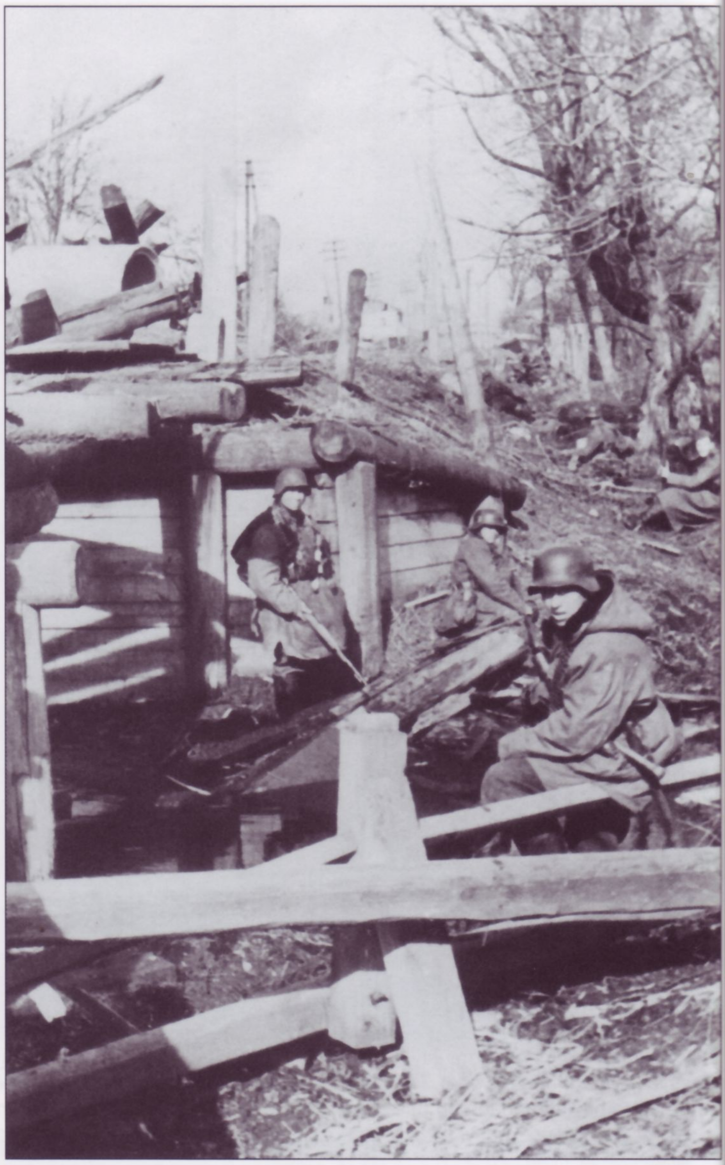
Elements of SS-Aufklärungs-Abteilung ““LAH”” enter the city center of Kharkov, March 1943. The unit's motorcycles were replaced by Volkswagen Type 166 Schwimmwagen amphibious scout cars, as seen here. Other reconnaissance units received the standard non-amphibious Volkswagen Type 82 Kübelwagen.



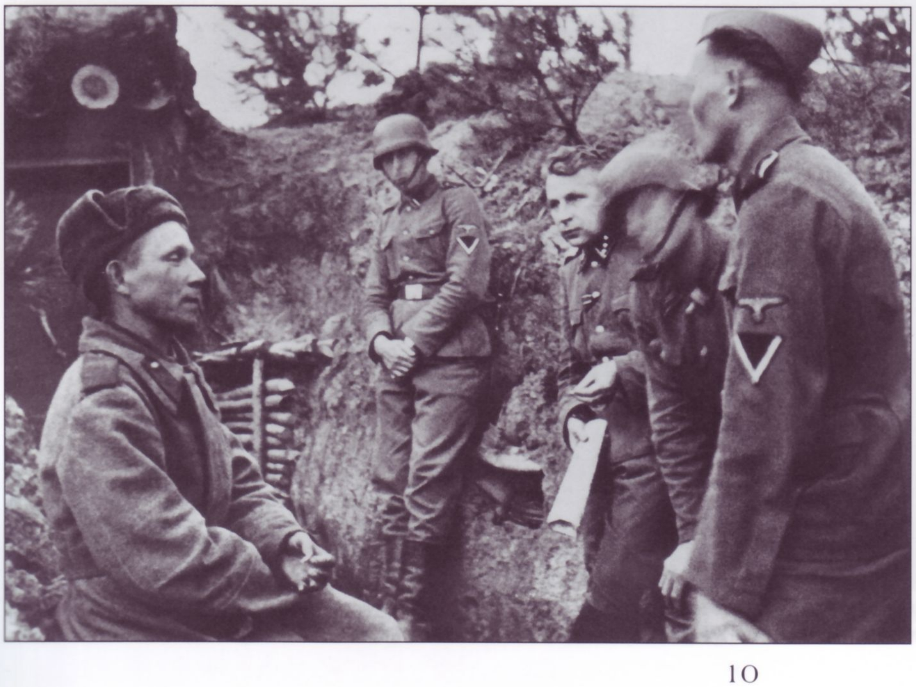
Three "LAH" troopers halt their Kübelwagen to celebrate their entry into Kharkov with an impromptu piano concert, March 1943. They wear (from left to right) the winter insulated suit, camouflage smock, and the black panzer uniform. Note the German national flag fastened over the hood of the Kübel, for ground-to-air recognition.



The spring thaw not only turned roads into rivers of mud, but also flooded defensive positions. This often collapsed their sides, making the defensive position untenable. Here an Oberscharführer repositions a hose pumping out a trench. This photograph also provides a more complete view of the winter boots that were issued with the winter uniform, which were usually seen with their uppers covered by the trousers.



SS troops pause beside a destroyed bridge. The construction is of the type indicating German pioneers built it. They wear newly issued winter suits, and carry Stg24 (M1924 stick hand grenades) as well as Eihgr39 (M1939 egg hand grenades).



Waffen-SS soldiers interrogate a Soviet private in a frontline trench. One of the two men to the right is no doubt an interpreter. To the left of them is an SS-Obersturmführer. The prisoner appears un-harassed and has been given a cigarette. He will later experience much different treatment and it is doubtful he survived a prisoner of war camp.

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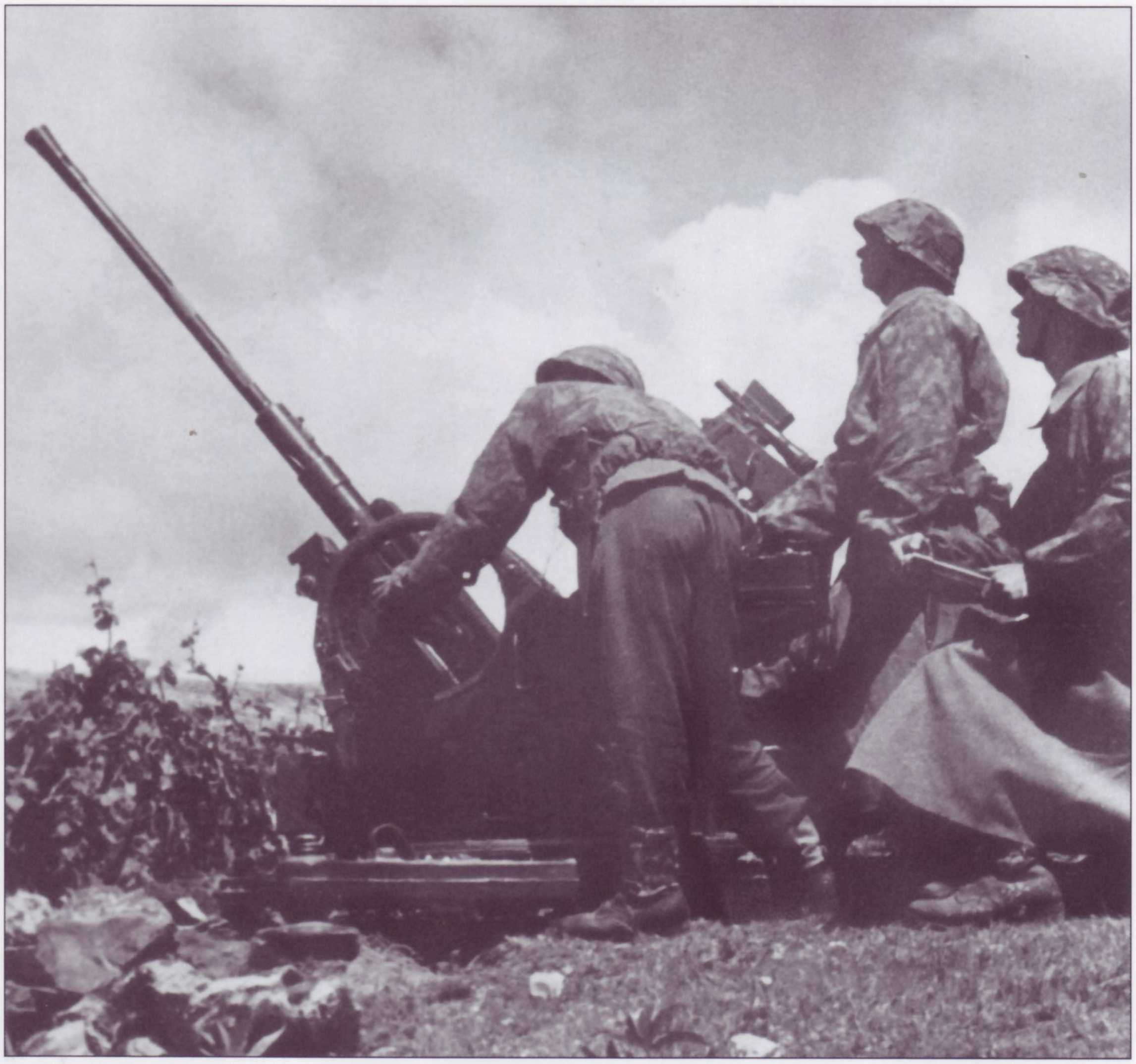
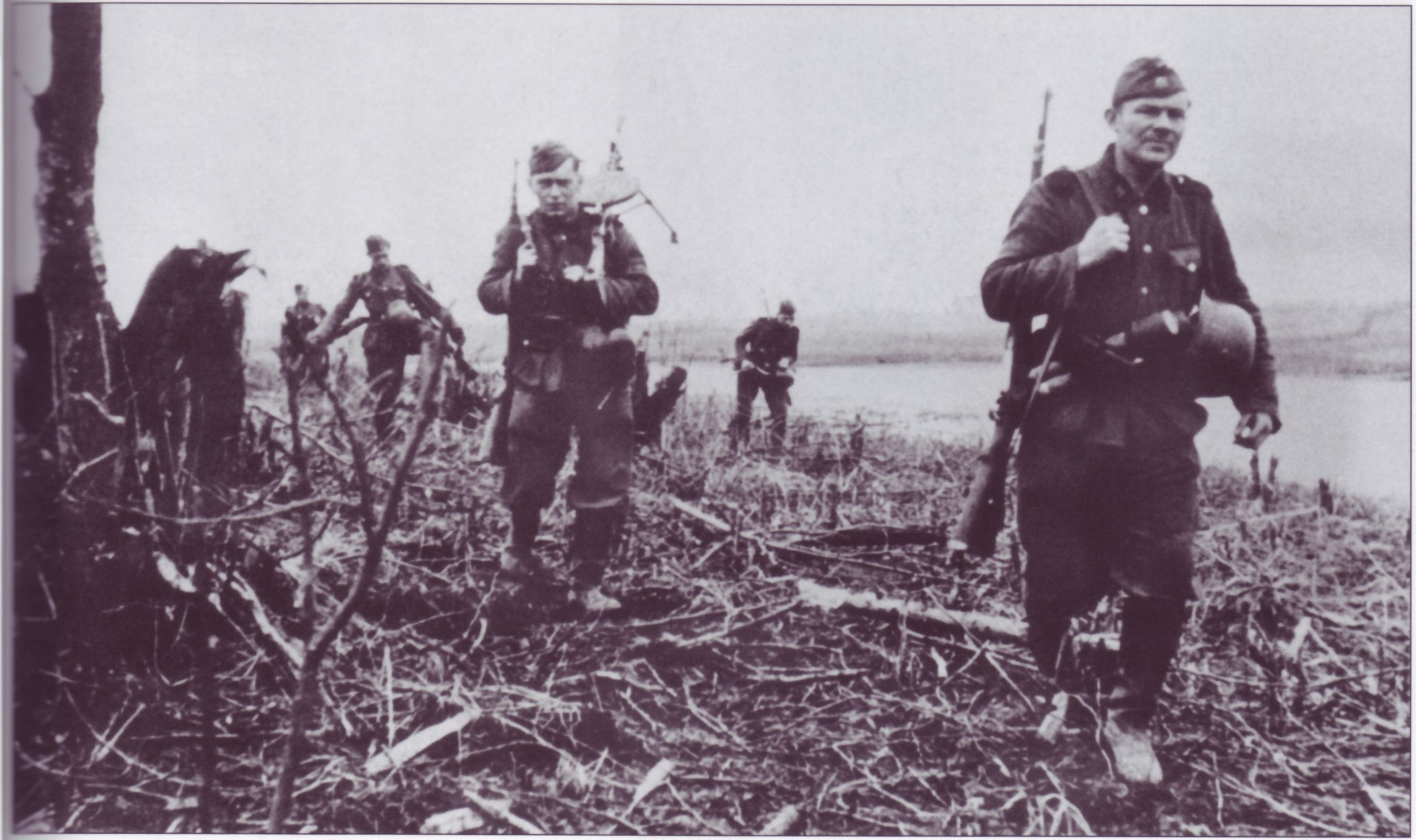
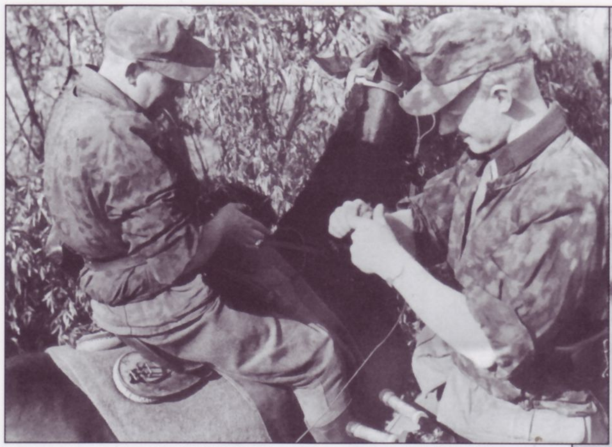
This 2cm FlaK38 antiaircraft gun, its shield removed, was an improved version of the FlaK30. It was lighter in weight and had a higher cyclic rate of fire (480 rpm vs. 280 rpm of the FlaK30), but being fed by a 20-round magazine its practical rate of fire was only 220 rpm. There was also a quadruple mounting, the Flakvierling 38.



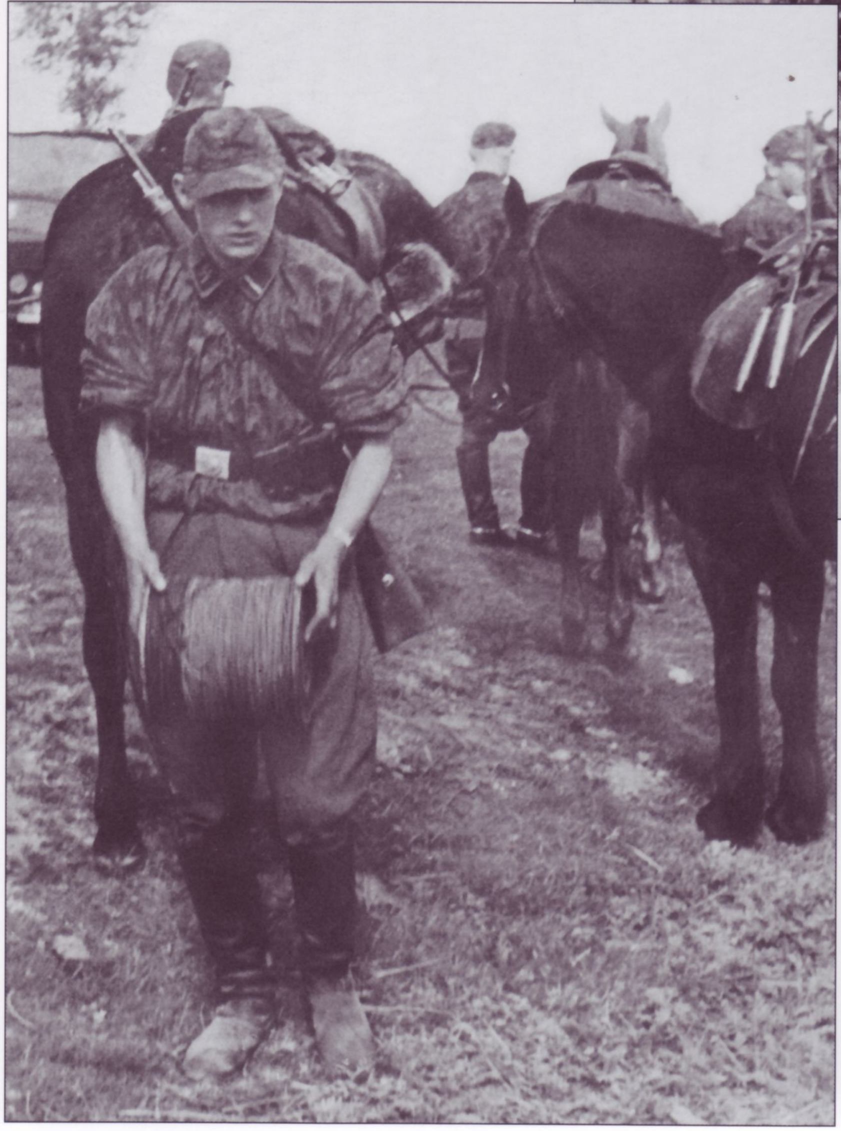
A patrol passes through a heavily shelled area. It was common for under-manned units to increase their firepower with captured weapons. The second man, in addition to his carbine, carries a Soviet 7.62mm DP light machine-gun with a 47-round magazine. The Germans called this rugged and reliable weapon an MG120(r).



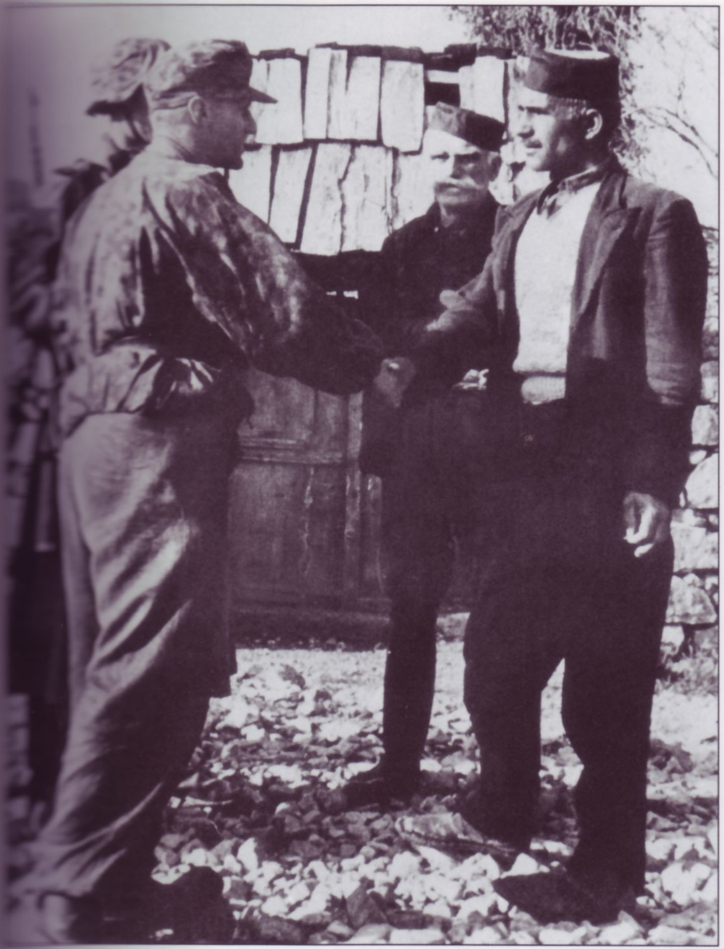


Waffen-SS signal troops repair a field telephone line, late spring 1943. Beneath the arm of the pistol-armed SS-Sturmmann to the right, is a small wire cutter with insulated handles. Beside camouflage smocks they wear the new universal field cap (Einheitsmütze), also in a camouflage pattern.

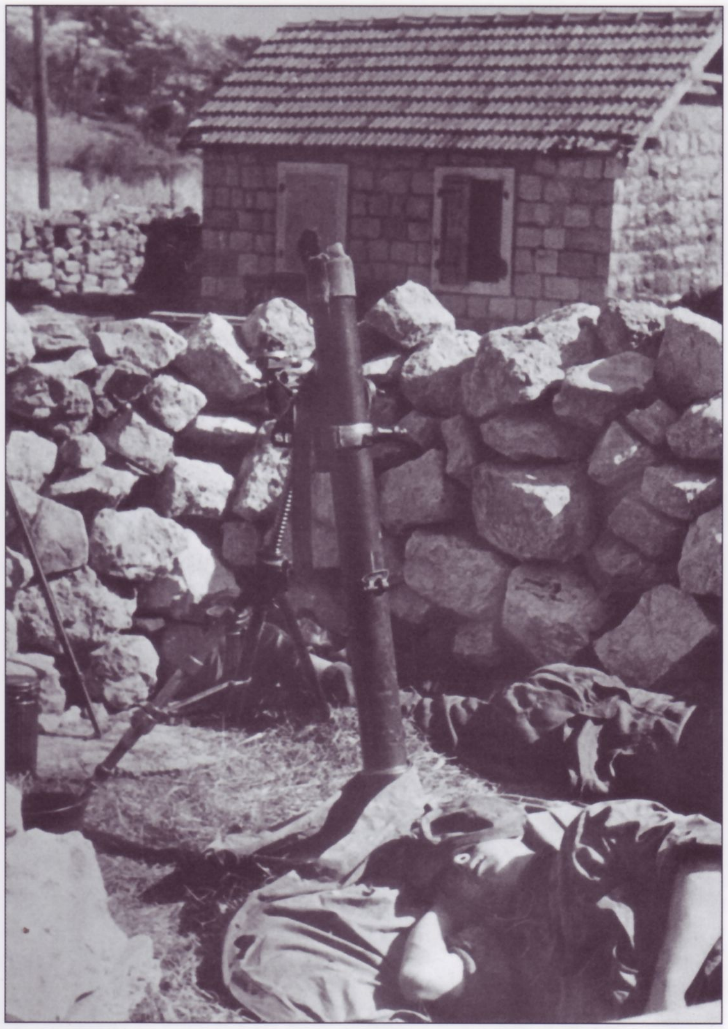
Troops of 7.SS-Freiwilligen-Gebirgs-Division "Prinz Eugen" o
patrol in the mountains of Yugoslavia, during mid-1943. This was
the first of the Waffen-SS divisions to be organized employin
"Volksdeutsche", German peoples living outside of Greate
Germany, in this case Serbians and Romanians. The divisio
was trained and equipped for anti-partisan duties in Yugoslavia



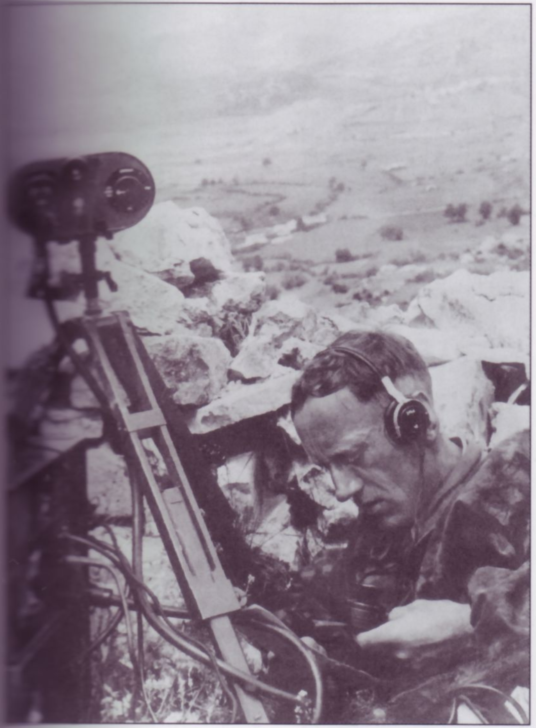
When laying field telephone wire over long distances, horses were sometimes used to speed up the lengthy process Standard procedure was for the higher echelon unit to lay wire down to its subordinate units.



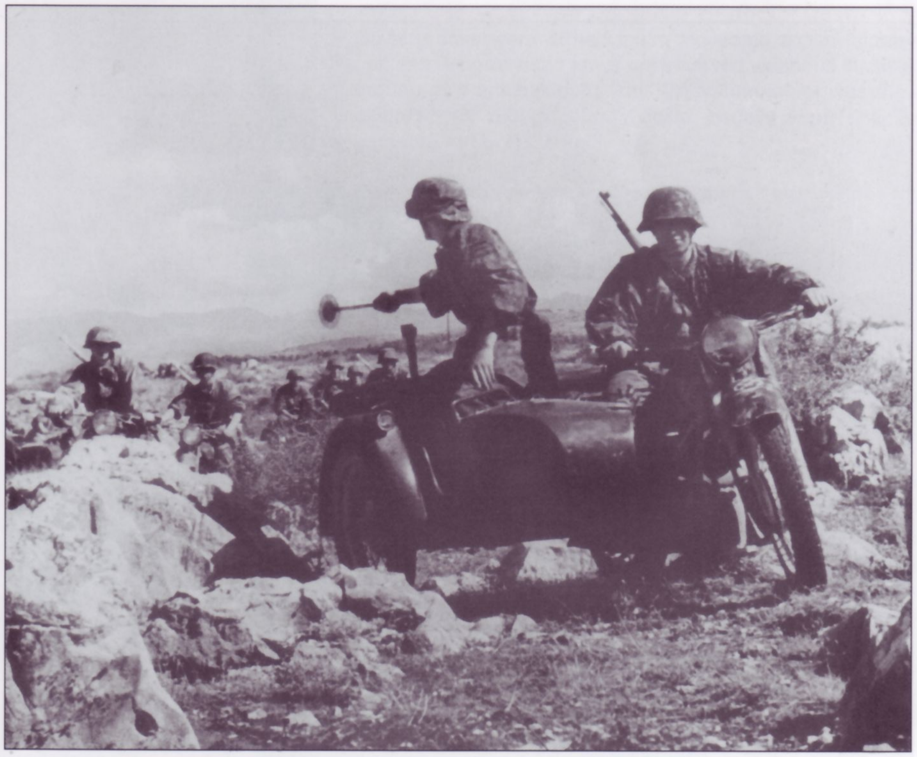
A Waffen-SS patrol talks to Yugoslavian peasants, July 1943. The Waffen-SS took advantage of the fact that "Volksdeutsche" in other countries were exempt from Wehrmacht conscription; this provided a large manpower pool. These kinds of recruits were also familiar with the local population, their language and the terrain, which were all very important assets for the successful conduct of anti-partisan operations.



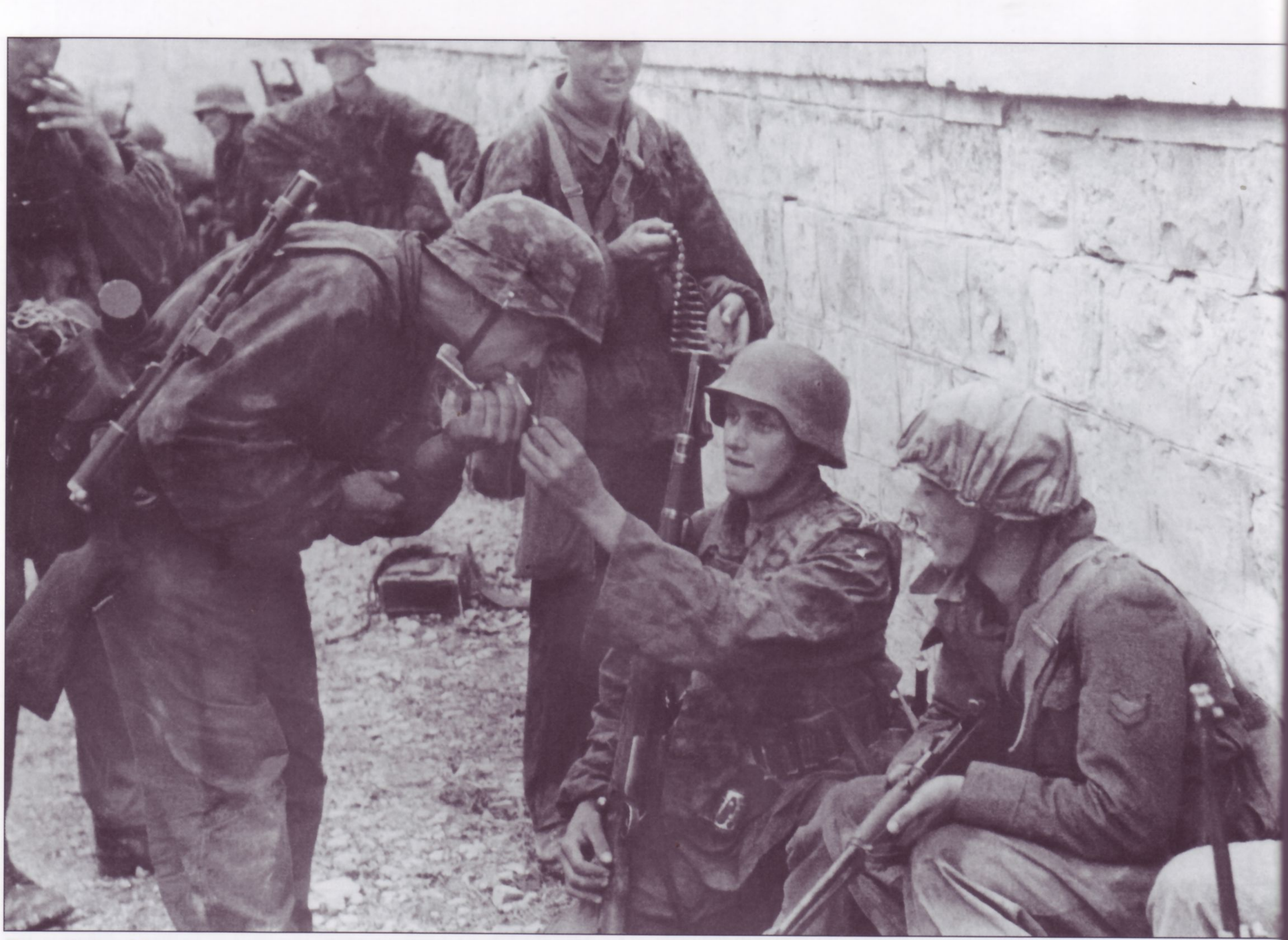
An 8cm GrW34 mortar crew grabs some sleep in their position in the Balkans, autumn 1943. This was the principal infantry mortar with six normally assigned to an infantry battalion's machine-gun company.



An observation post in the Balkans, autumn 1943. Such posts were used to detect partisan movements, though they were of little use at night when partisans were most active. The tripod-mounted device is reported to be a high-intensity signal relay light.

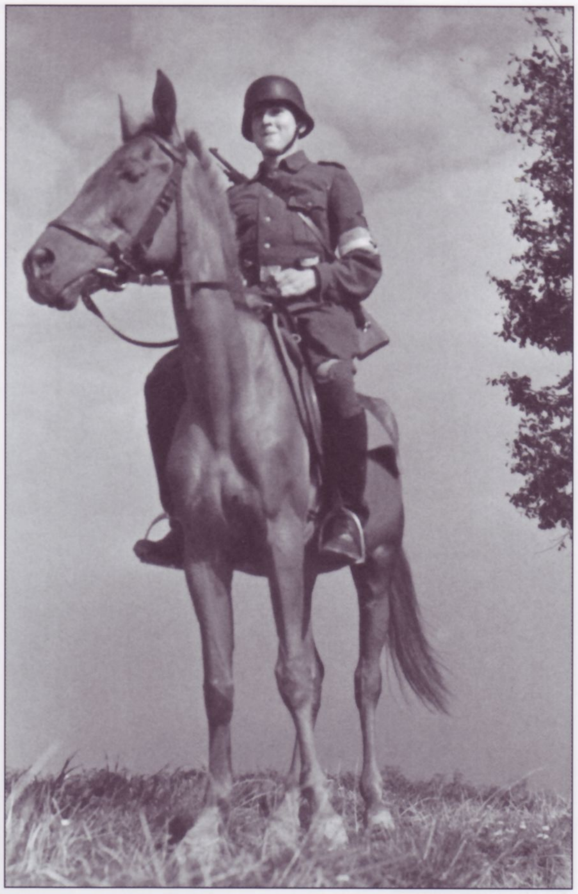


As the war progressed, most motorcycle rifle units were converted to the reconnaissance role. Motorcycles were still employed in such units on a limited scale, while they were still in general use to convey couriers. The passenger on this combination motorcycle signals direction or formation changes using a traffic wand which held a white-bordered red disc.

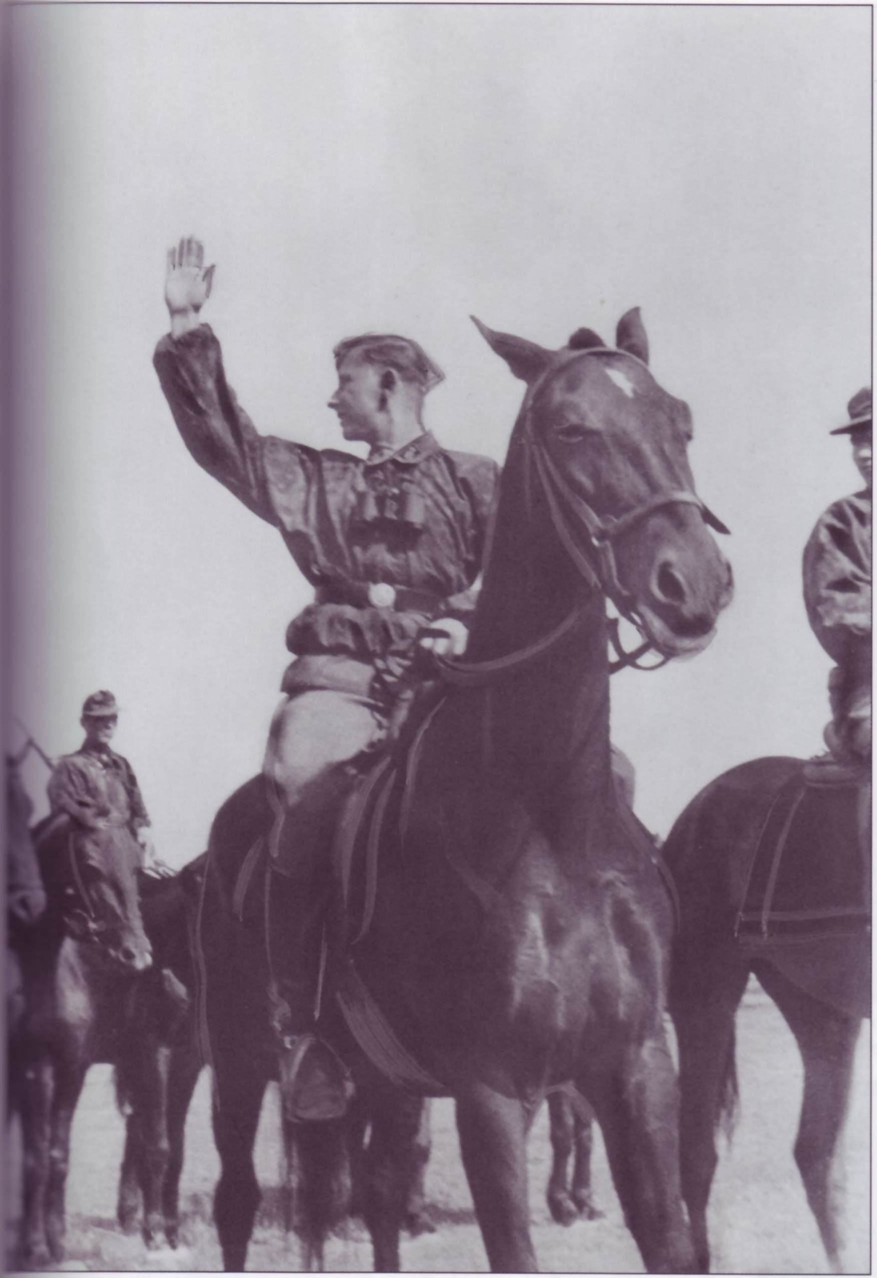


These Waffen-SS soldiers are accompanied by Italian soldier in the Balkans, 1943. The seated man is an Italian corporal armed with a Carcano 6.5m M1891 carbine with a folding bayonet. The Waffen-SS soldier receiving a cigarette carries a 9mm MP28 machine-pistol. This was a Bergmann-desig produced in Denmark for the Waffen-SS throughout the war.

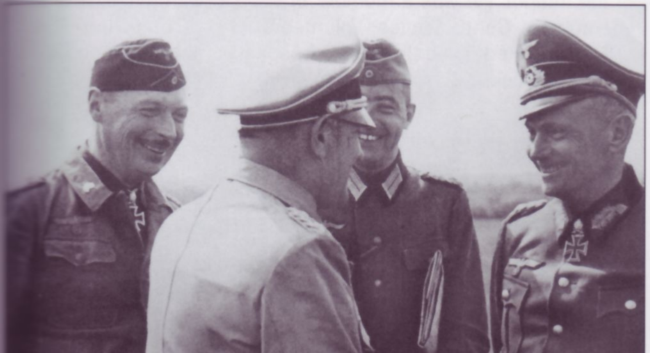
The Waffen-SS cavalryme of the "Florian Geyer Division frequentl participated in anti-partisa operations. Their steed gave them good mobilit over rough terrain and the could cover much mor ground than foot units, t include the partisans. Mos leather gear carried b infantrymen was black, bu leather horse equipmen was reddish-brown.



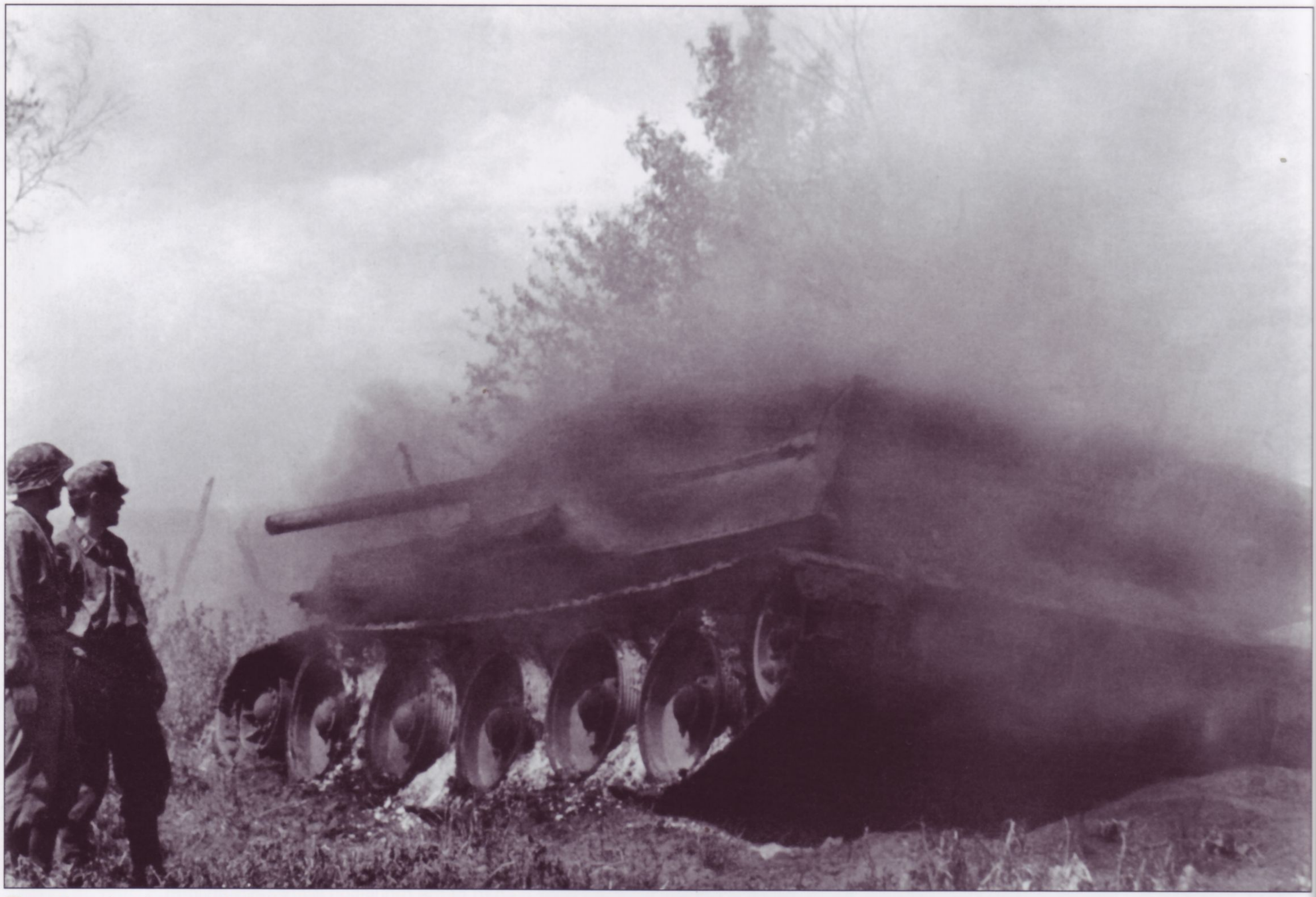
A young Waffen-SS cavalryman in an obviously posed photograph, which provides a good view of the details of the horse's halter. On his uniform he wears his old "Hitlerjugend" (Hitler Youth) armband, which was not normally worn as a part of the regulation Waffen-SS uniform.



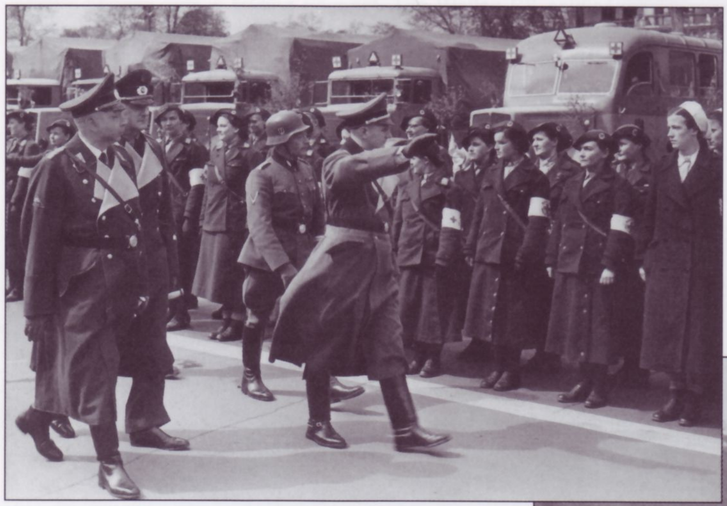
Cavalry units were armed much the same as an infantry unit, but generally had fewer crew-served weapons such as mortars and antitank guns. This Untersturmführer wears an officer's belt with a round buckle, usually worn only in garrison, rarely in the field.



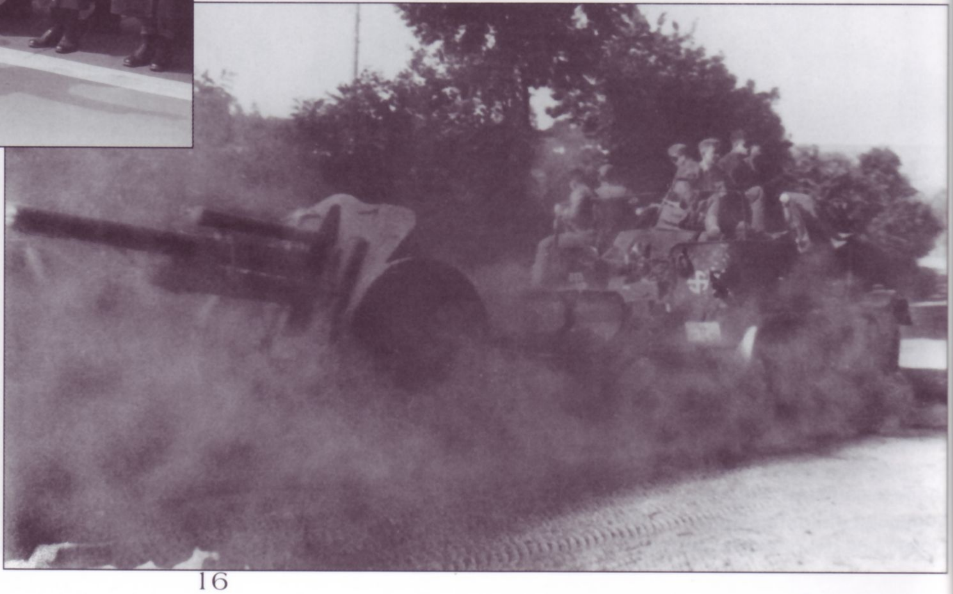
Waffen-SS units on the Eastern Front had made it through the brutal Russian Winter of 1942/43 and would face renewed Soviet offensives. These May 1943 scenes show Oberst Graf Hyazinth Strachwitz (left of Dietrich in the first photo) discussing his unit's actions with Obergruppenführer Joseph "Sepp" Dietrich (back to camera in the first photo, light tunic), commander of SS-Panzergrenadier-Division "Leibstandarte SS Adolf Hitler" ("LAH"). In July, Dietrich would take command of the newly created I.SS-Panzerkorps. Strachwitz was awarded the Knight's Cross of the Iron Cross on 25 August 1941, the Oak Leaves on 17 November 1942, and the Swords on 28 March 1943 while commanding Panzerregiment Großdeutschland.



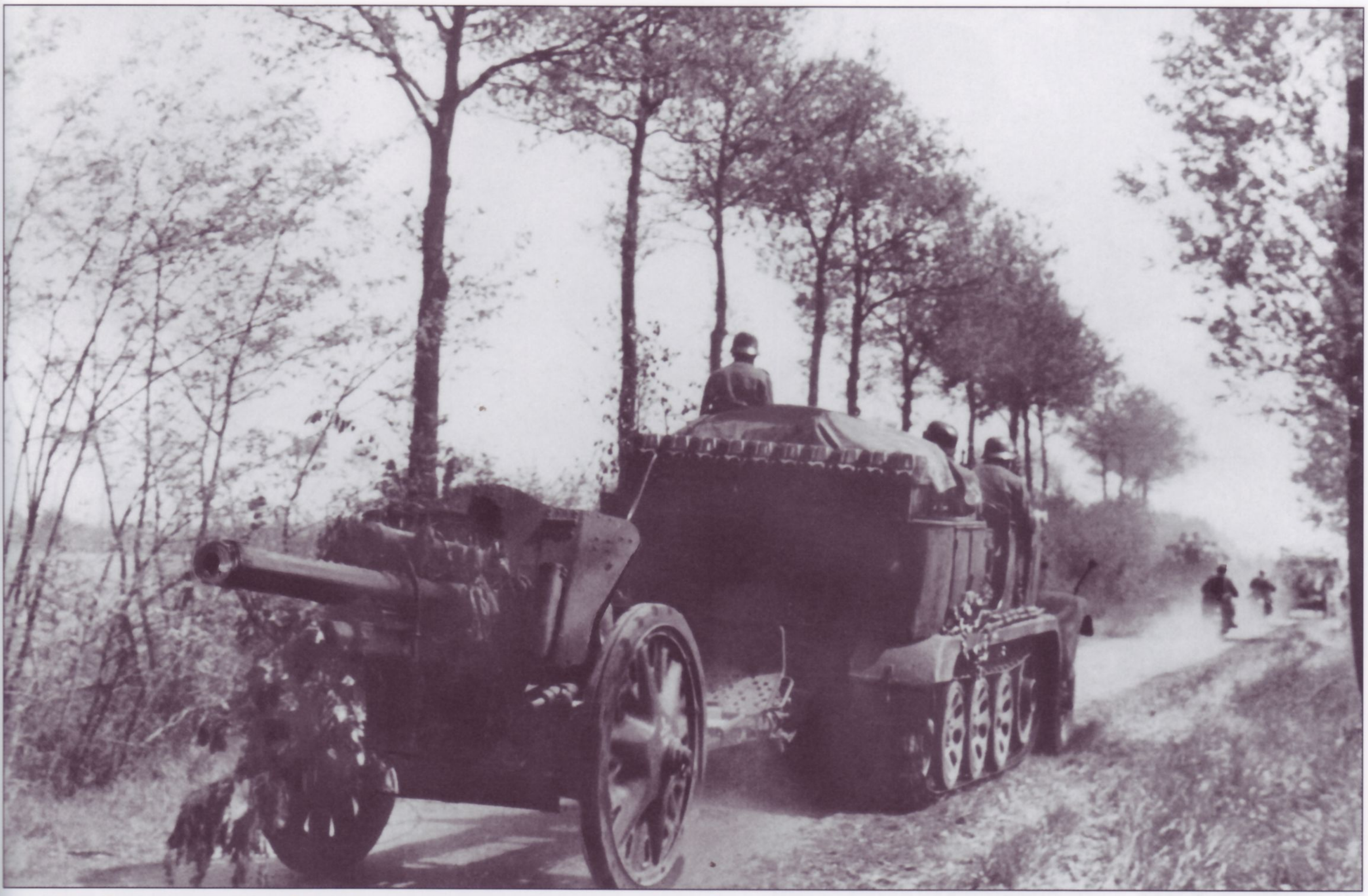
The ash and molten metal piled between the road wheels of this still smoldering T-34/76 attests to the intensity of the ammunition-enhanced internal fires. These Waffen-SS men appear to wear camouflage tunics with a camouflage cover on the helmet and a camouflage field cap.



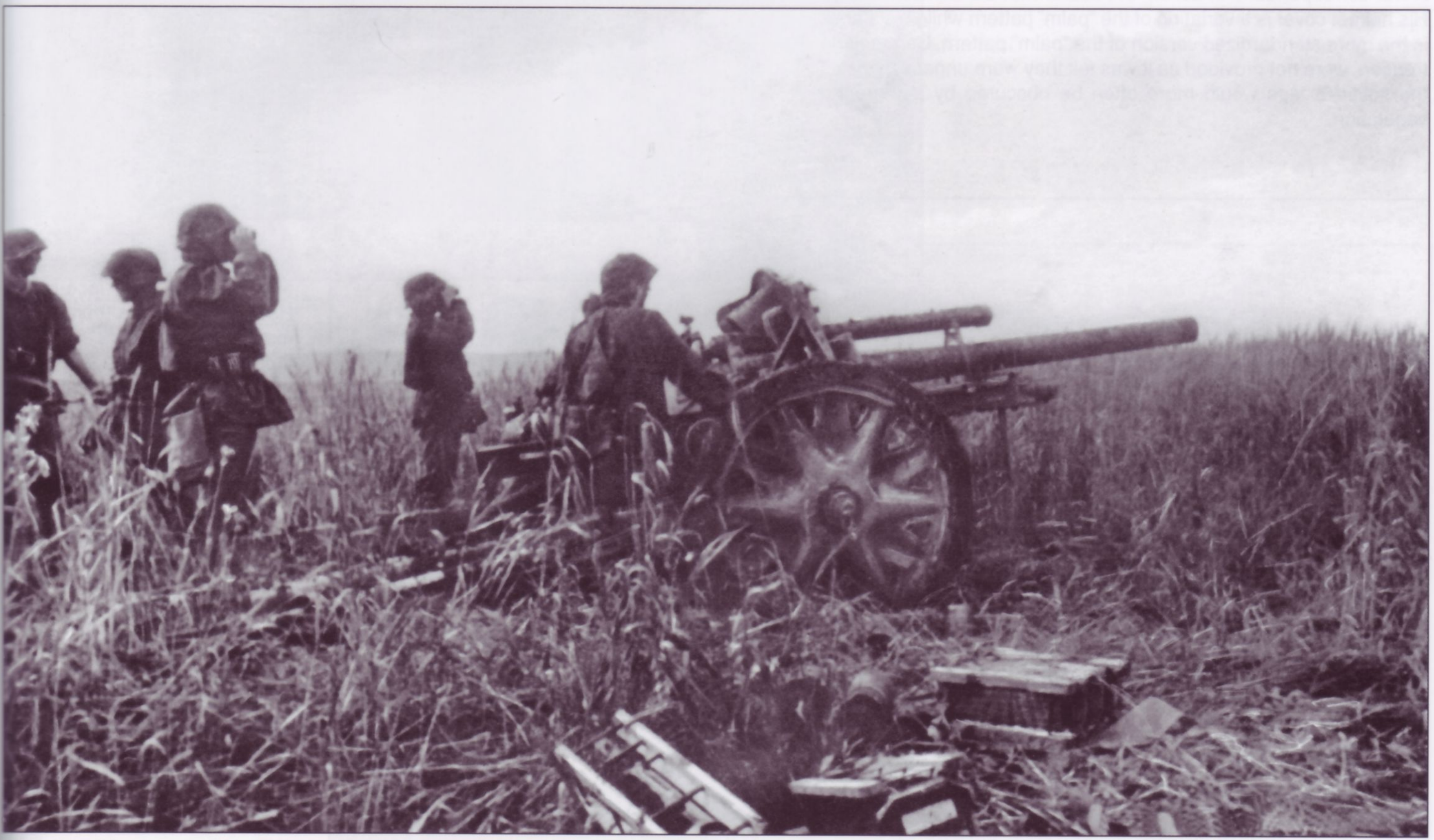
Pictured here is Dr. Leonardo Conti, State Secretary for Health in the Reich Ministry of the Interior. He was a member of the SS, with the rank of SS-Obergruppenführer. Conti salutes volunteers of a Deutschen Roten Kreuzes (German Red Cross) mobile hospital column composed of women. Other SS officials accompany him.



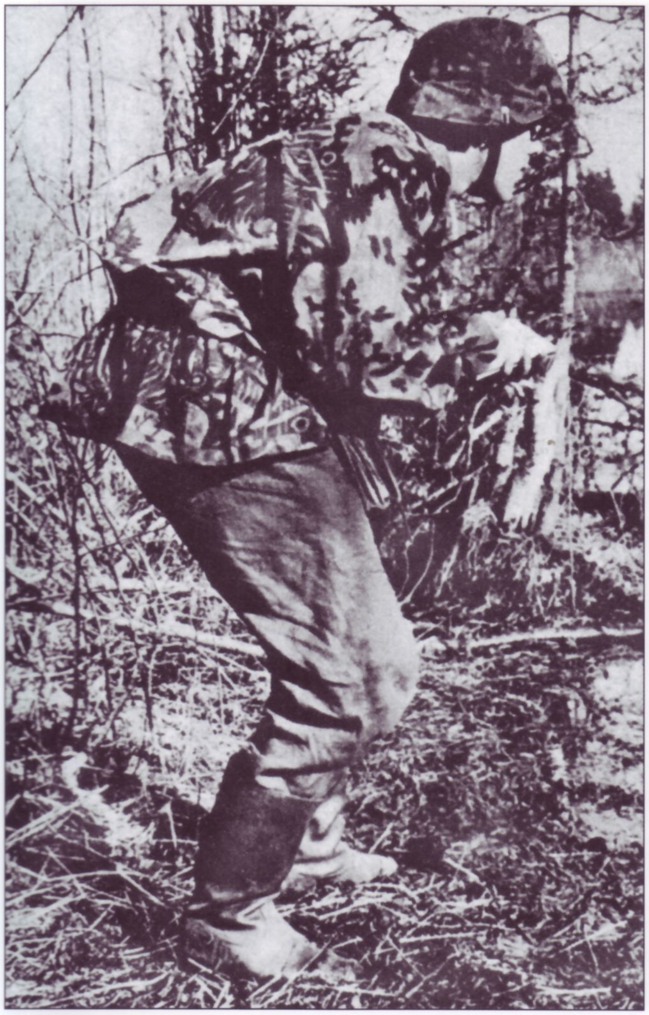
Shrouded in dust, an SS-Division "Wiking" 10.5cm l.FH18 light field howitzer is towed in Russia by a leichten Zugkraftwagen 3-ton Sd.Kfz.11 halftrack prime mover. The "Wiking" division used a white (or yellow) "spinning" swastika as its unit symbol, seen here on the upper right corner of the halftrack's superstructure.



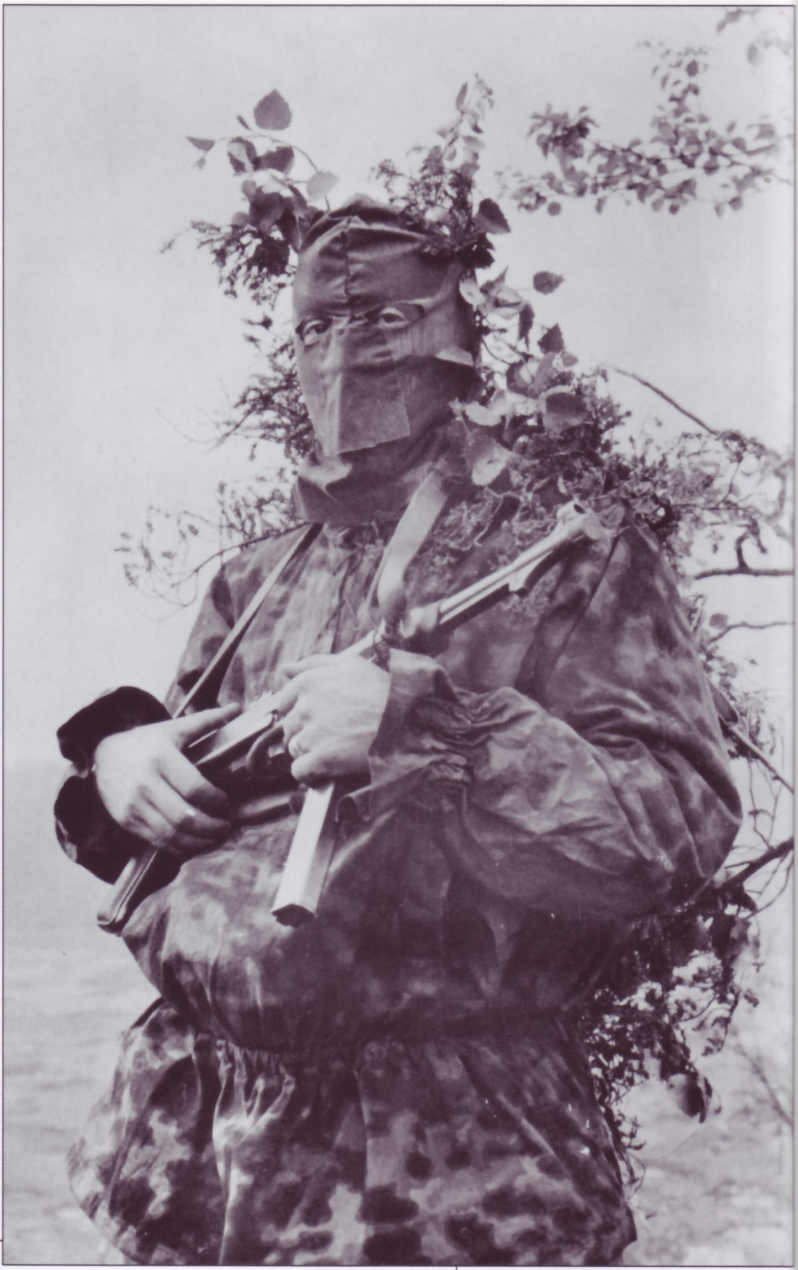
A mittlerer Zugkraftwagen 5-ton Sd.Kfz.6 halftrack prime mover tows a 10.5cm l.FH18 light field howitzer. This was the standard divisional artillery piece of both the Waffen-SS and Army.



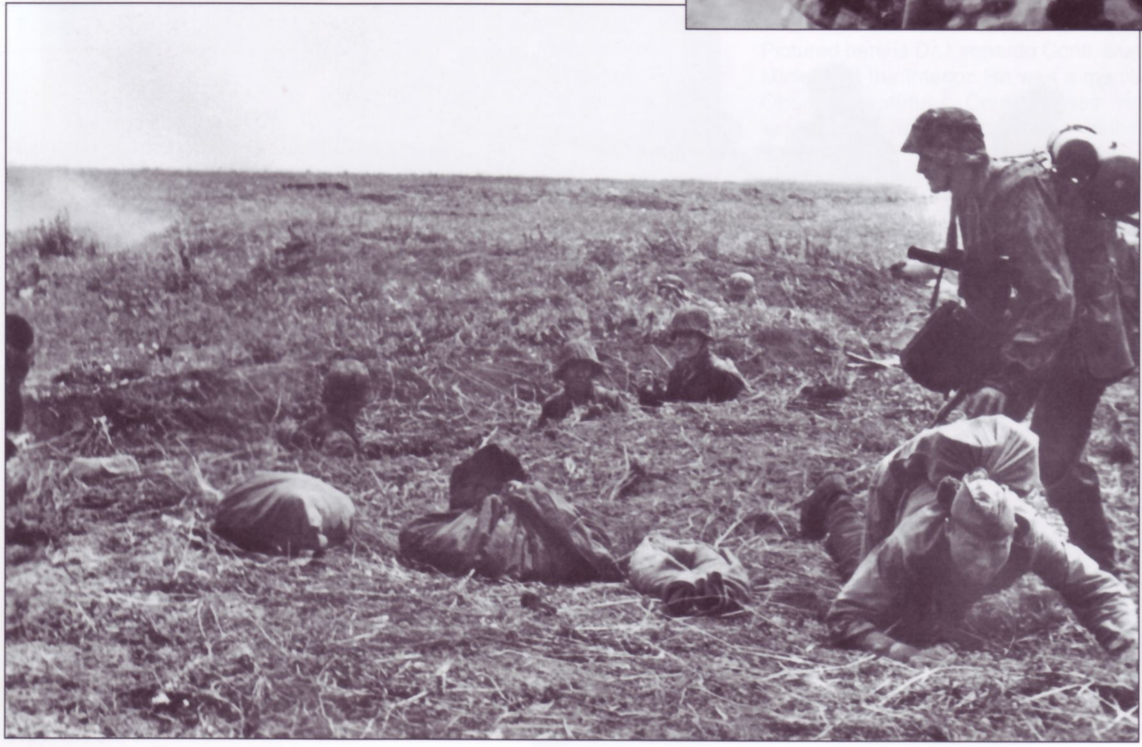
A Waffen-SS 10.5cm l.FH18 light field howitzer opens fire during an operation in Russia. To the right are shipping containers for projectiles and propellant cartridges. Note that the crew wears camouflage smocks. It was unusual for artillerymen to be issued camouflage smocks, as they were in short supply and normally provided only to infantry units.



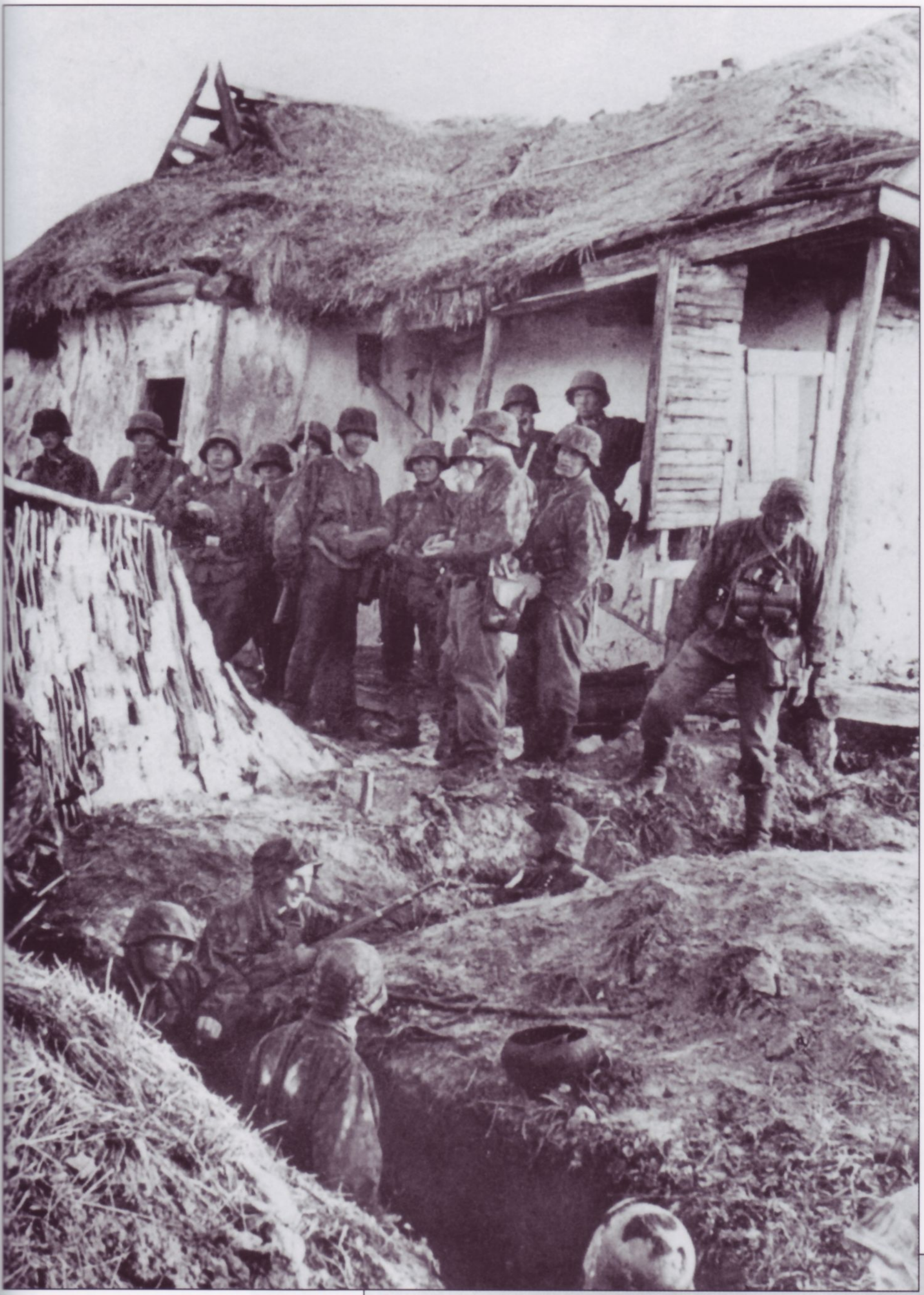
A war correspondent "in action" in Finland with SS-Division "Nord". His helmet cover is a variation of the "palm" pattern while his smock is the more standardized version of the "palm" pattern. Camouflage trousers were not provided as it was felt they were unnecessary, as the soldier's legs would more often be obscured by low ground vegetation.



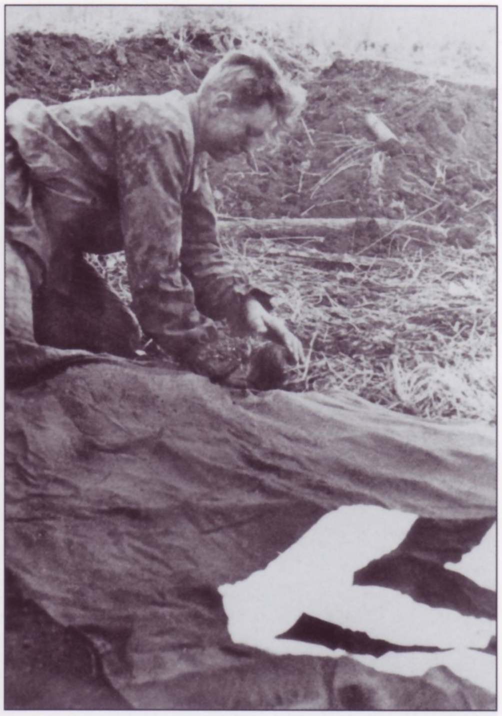
A Waffen-SS assault trooper wears the camouflage smock and the little used face-mask. He is armed with a 9mm MP40 machine-pistol, its muzzle taped over to protect it from dirt and debris; the first burst could be fired through the tape. The bulky appearance of his smock is because it is worn over his belt equipment. The attached foliage is more for breaking up the soldier's silhouette than actually providing concealment itself.



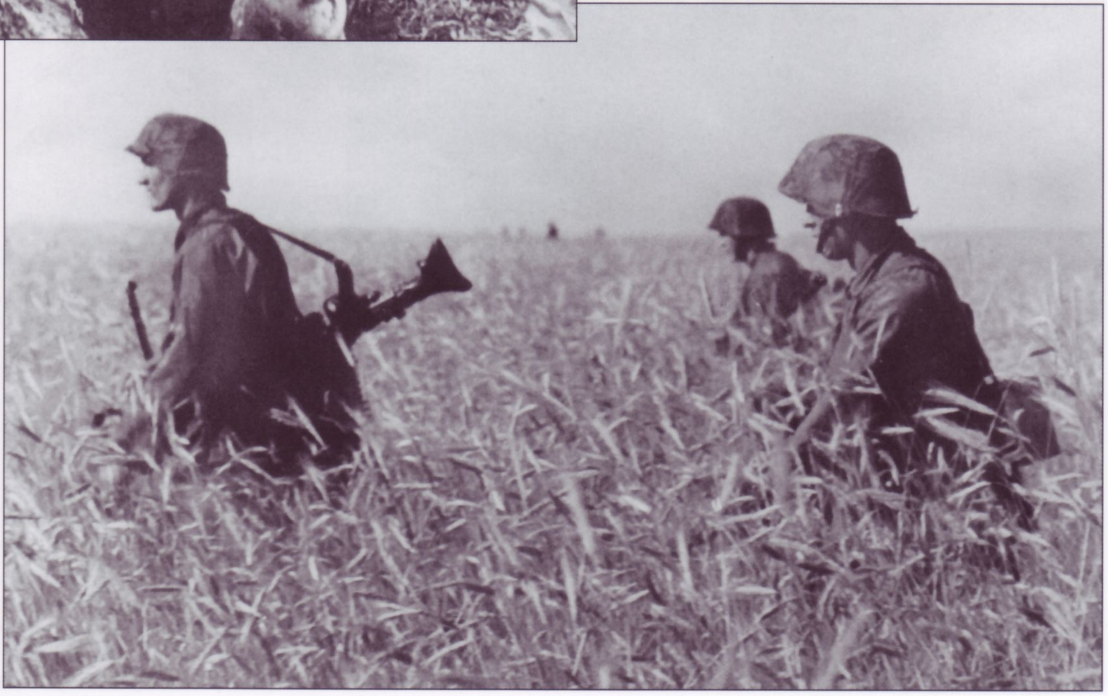
Beginning on 5 July 1943, Operation "Zitadelle" (Citadel) attempted to destroy Soviet forces in the Kursk salient. Here, initially victorious assault troops roust Soviet troops from their trenches. The Waffen-SS assault pioneer to the right carries a Flammenwerfer 41 flamethrower.



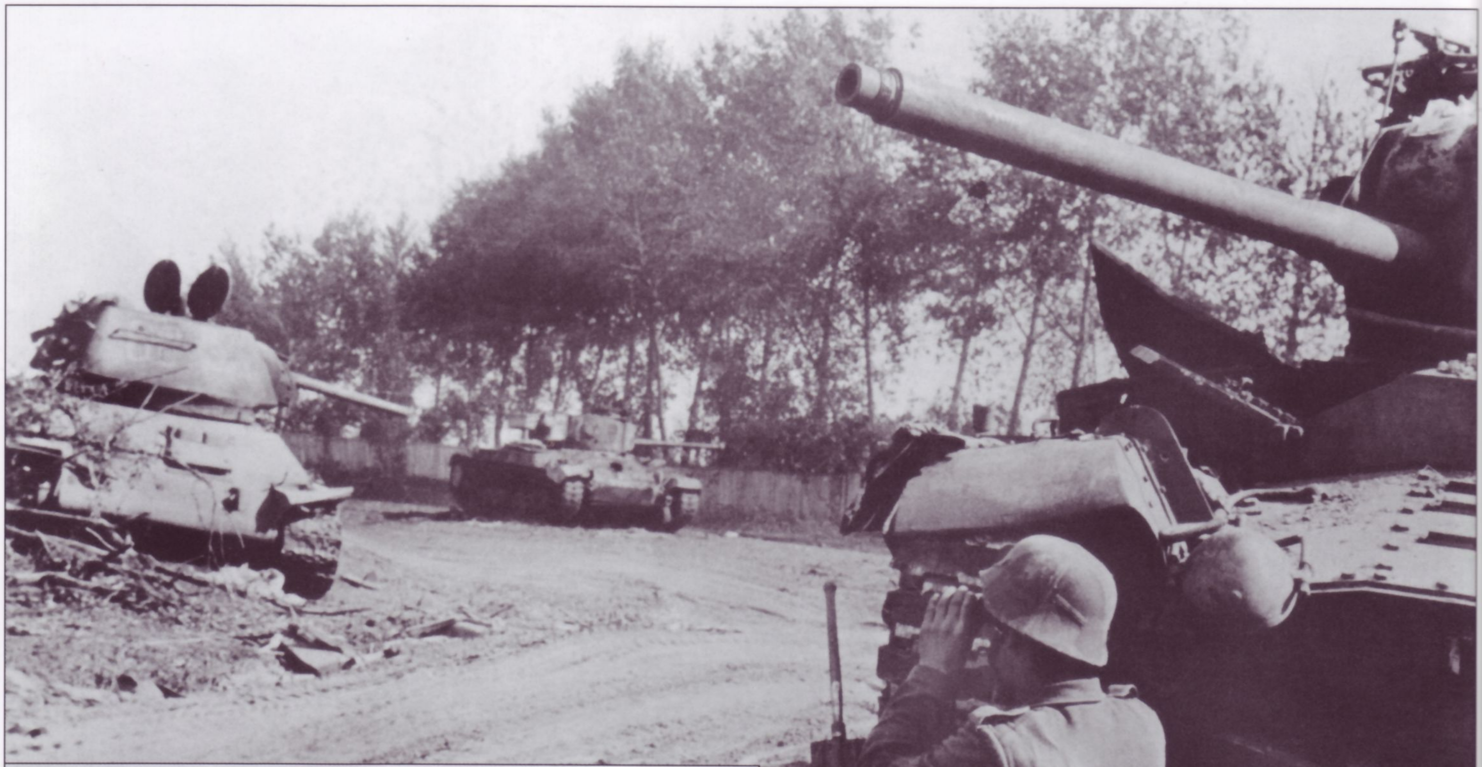
Victorious Waffen-SS troops consolidate in a Russian village during the initial phase of Operation "Zitadelle". The troops are still fresh and clean-shaven as they occupy Soviet trenches.



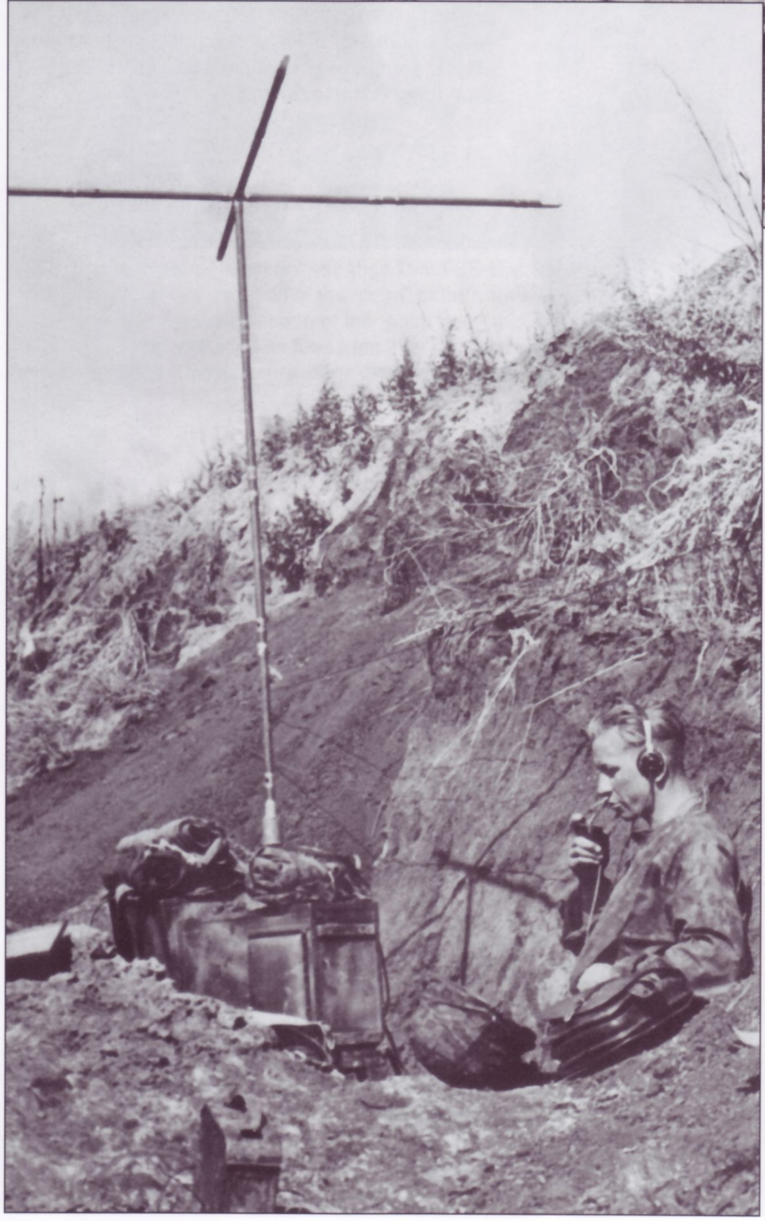
A Waffen-SS infantryman lays out the German National Colors (Reichsfarben) beside his frontline position, July 1943. Colored cloth panels were used early in the war, but it was found that the enemy would sometimes duplicate these to confuse supporting German aircraft.



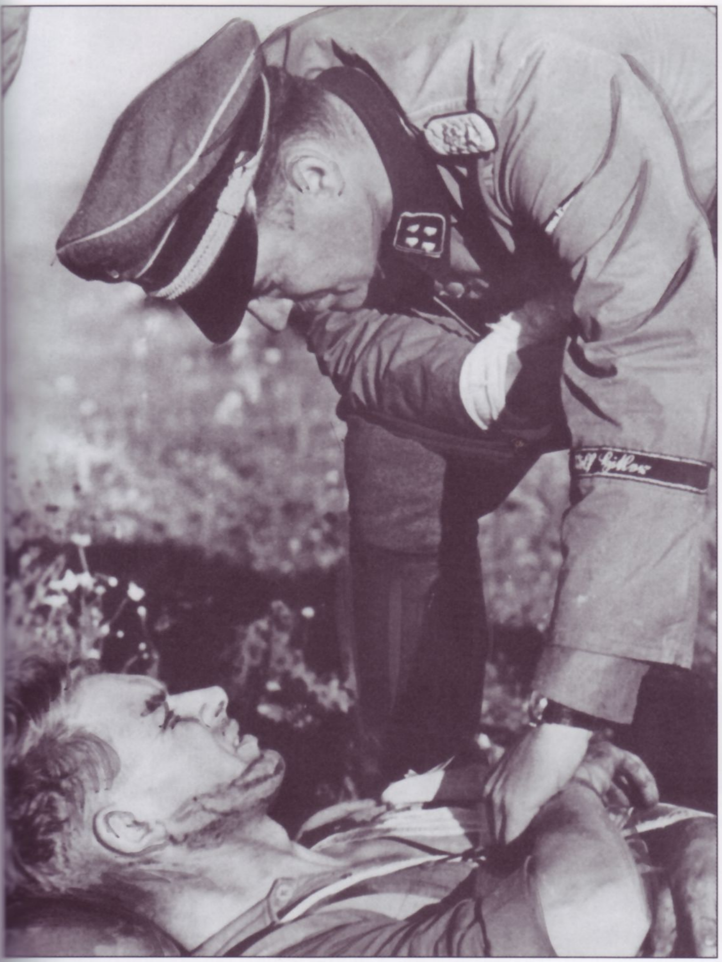
A Waffen-SS MG34 machine-gun team advances through a wheat field during the Battle of Kursk. German rifle groups (squads) had one or two machine-guns. Although by this time the new MG42 was in production, the MG34 would continue to be manufactured until the war's end, remaining in wide use.



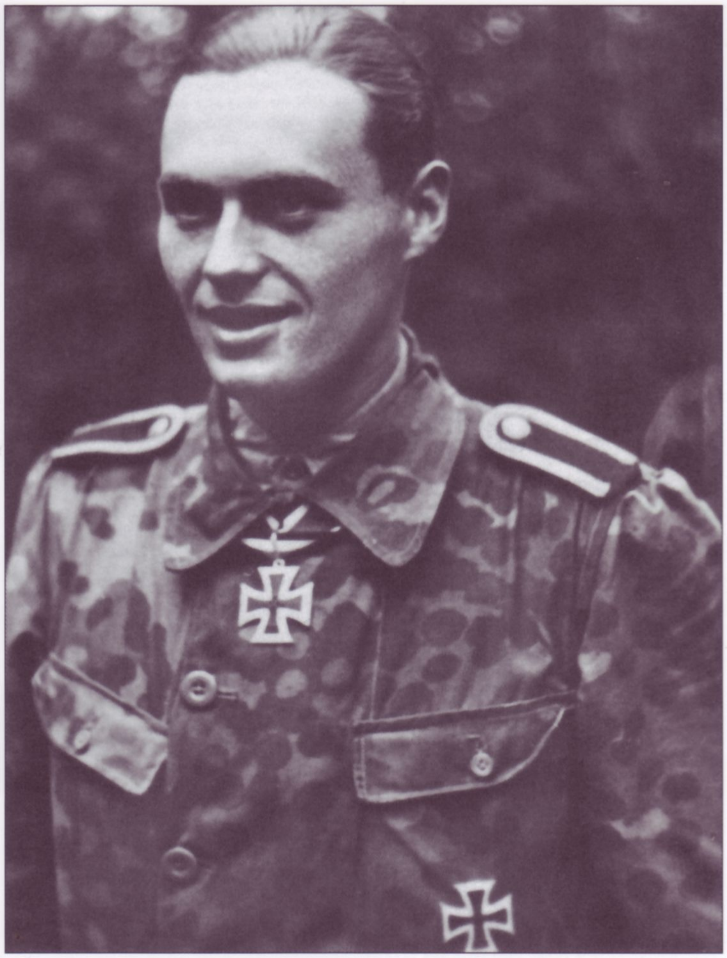
A sentry keeps lookout amid the wreckage of a Soviet counterattack. Besides the knocked out T-34/76 there are two British-made Valentine Mk VIII or Mk IX infantry tanks (the difference was the engines). Large numbers of different Valentine tank marks were provided to Russia through Lend-Lease. The Soviet's liked the Valentine's simplicity, but not its 2-pounder (40mm) gun on earlier marks or 6-pounder (57mm) as here and pockmarked with bullet strikes. Some were refitted by the Russians with a 76.2mm gun. Valentines in Russian service were usually painted light gray. Note the folding spade (Klappspaten) beside the sentry. Adopted by the Germans in 1938, it was copied by the U.S. Army in 1943.



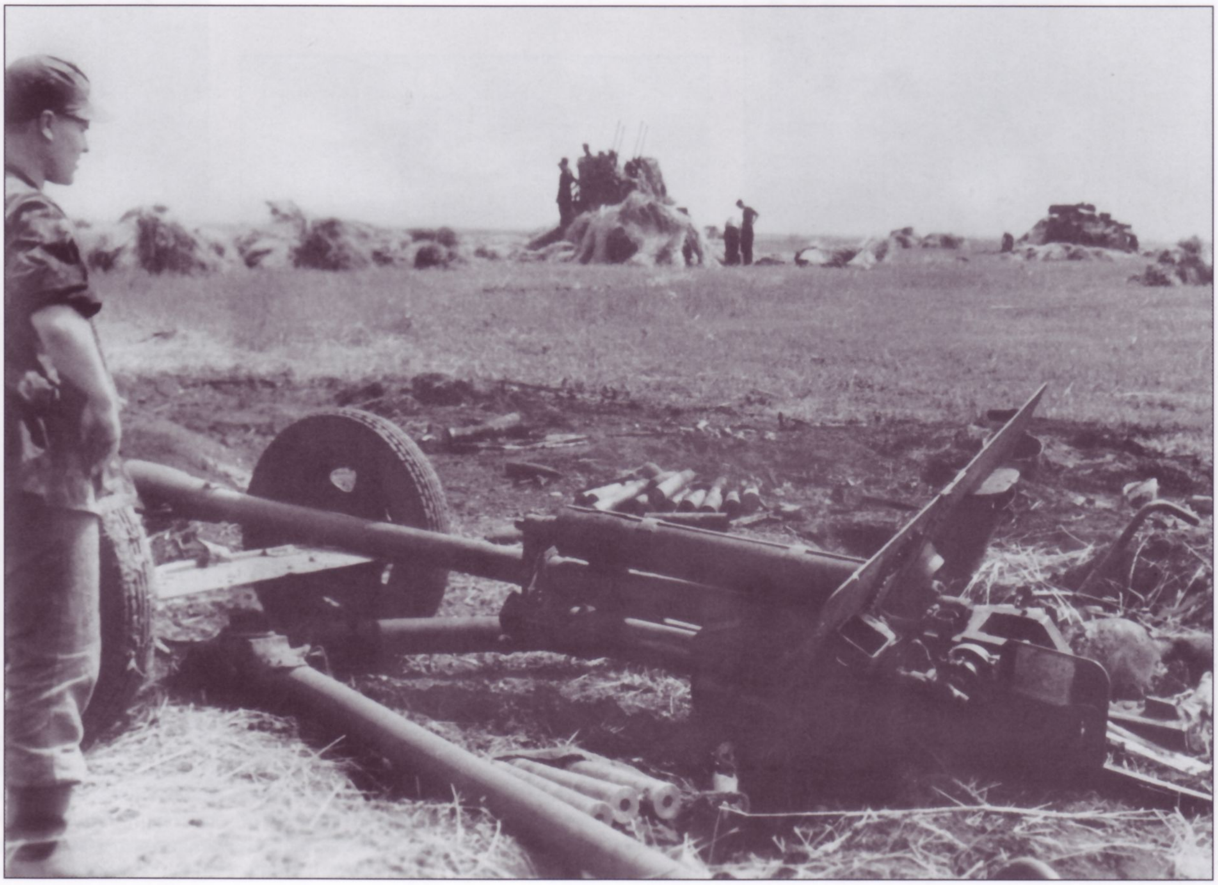
This forward unit's radio post is dug in on the reverse sloop of a ridge. Note that the Torn.Fu.b1 receiver/transmitter is camouflage-painted. This type of radio was found at battalion, or higher echelons and was frequently used by artillery forward observers.



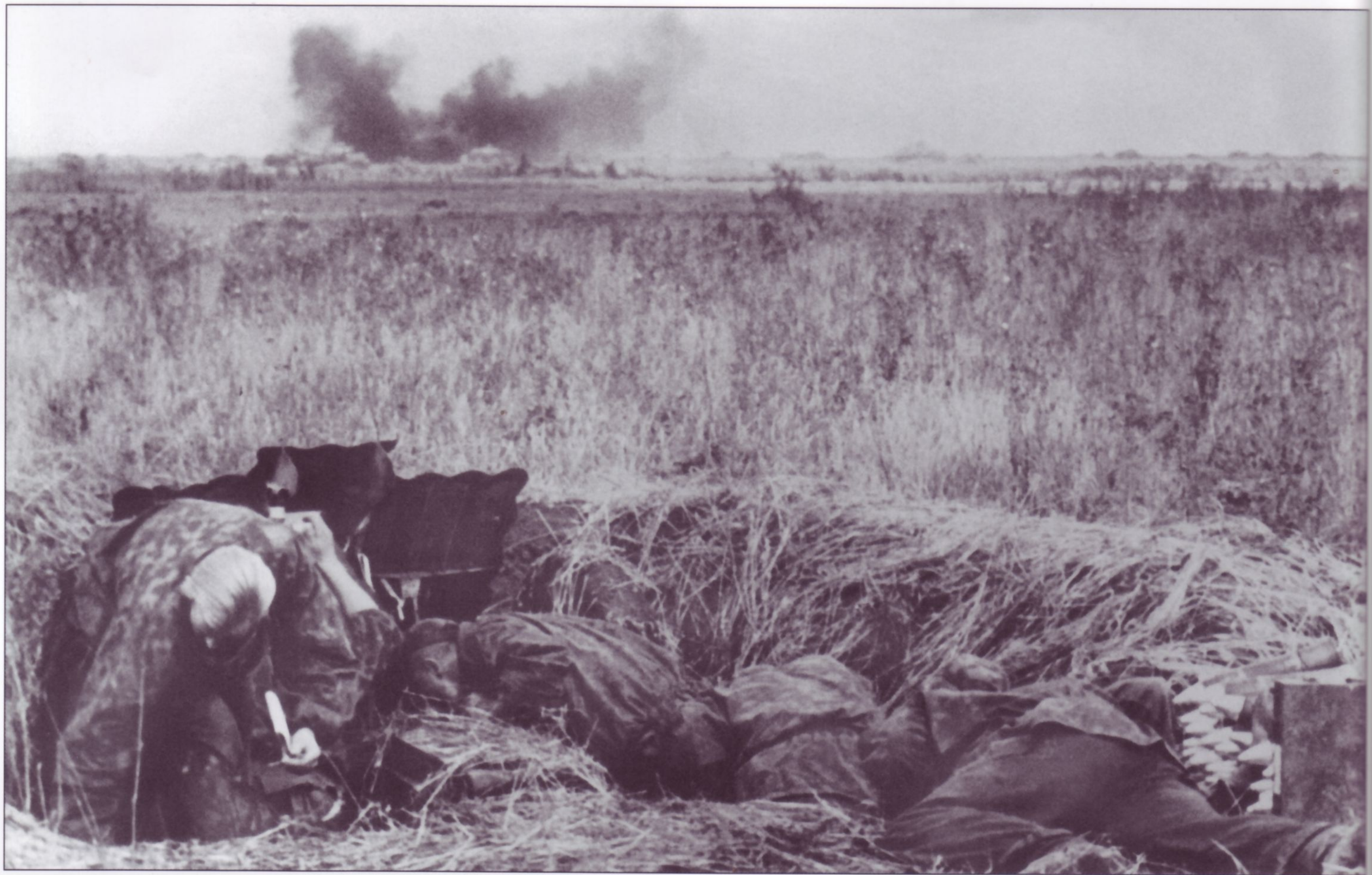
A “LAH” Sturmbannführer, himself with a bandaged hand, comforts one of his wounded men, July 1943. The silver on-black “LAH” cuff band, inscribed with Hitler's signature, can be seen on the Sturmbannführers left sleeve. Early in the Kursk operation, many of the wounded were evacuated by air transport.



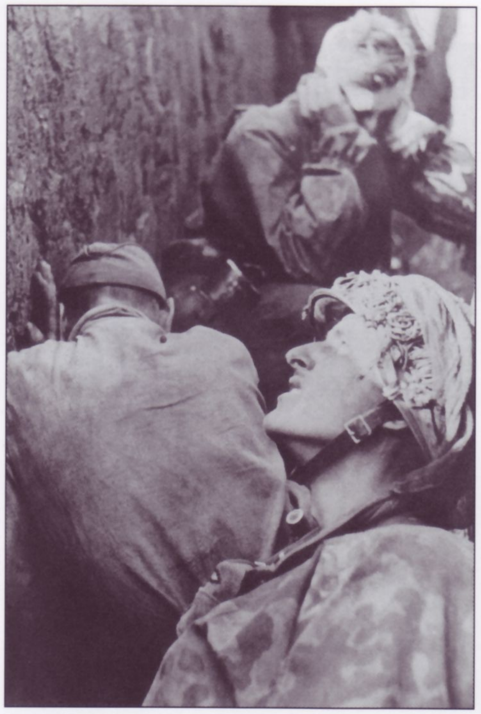
SS-Unterscharführer Franz Staudegger from 13.Kompanie, SS-Panzer-Regiment 1 of “LAH”, commanded a Tiger tank during “Zitadelle”. His own tank was disabled, but he and his crew still managed to knock out 22 T-34 tanks. He was one of the few enlisted men to be awarded the Knight's Cross.



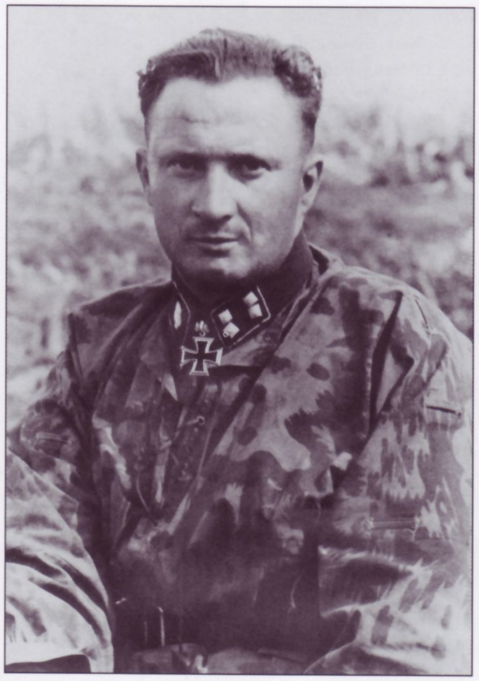
A Waffen-SS soldier inspects a Soviet 76.2mm ZIS-3 field gun reportedly crushed by a German tank. This was the principal Soviet divisional artillery piece, which was also an effective anti-tank gun. In the background is an Sd.Kfz.7-mounted 2cm Flakvierling 38 anti-aircraft gun. Besides air defense, this weapon was effective against personnel, buildings, light field fortifications and light armored fighting vehicles.



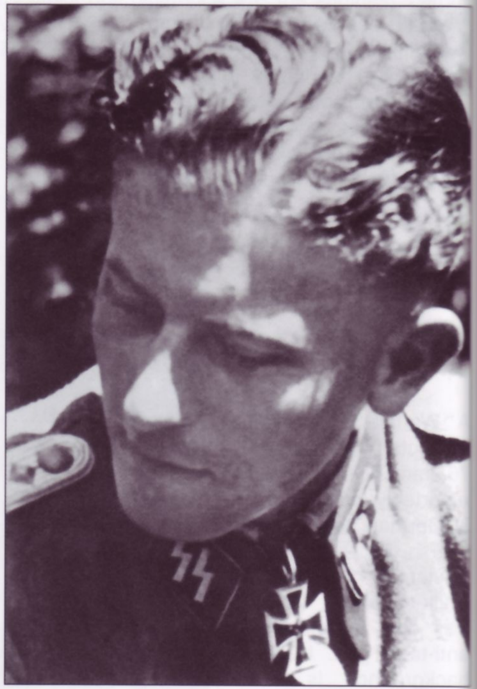
The crew of a 7.5cm l.IG18 light infantry gun shelter behind their position's parapet, probably from bursting artillery or mortar rounds off-camera. A regiment's infantry gun company (13.Kompanie) generally had four or six of these pieces. Note that rather than a more easily spotted straight edge, the gun shield's upper edge was irregular, which was intended to distort its silhouette. The position's parapet has been covered with wheat stalks on all sides to make it more difficult to detect from the air.



These SS troops are enduring a heavy bombardment during August of 1943, a most stressful situation. The man in the foreground has both a camouflage facemask and a mosquito net pulled up on the front of his helmet. Once the barrage had ceased the soldier might exclaim, "Das war prima!" (That was tops!), as a means to help recover his fortitude after the ordeal.

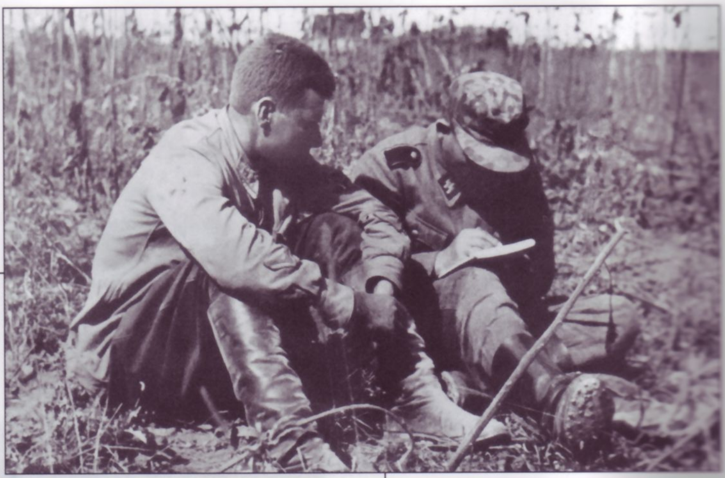


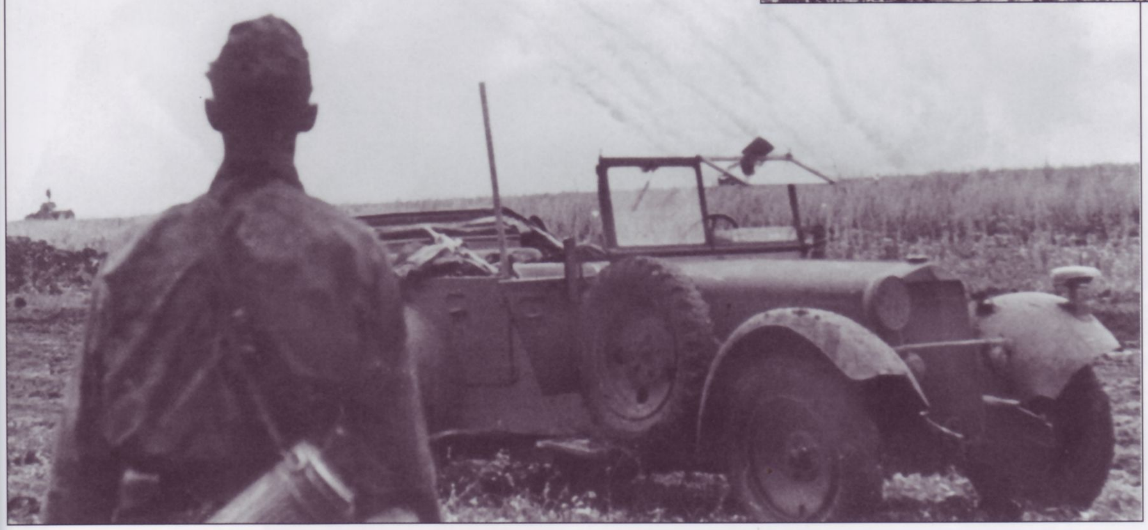
Pictured here is SS-Sturmbannführer Ernst Haussler, who won his Knight's Cross on 18 August 1943 for successful actions after the "Zitadelle" operation. He served as commander of II.Abteilung, SS-Panzer-Regiment 3, of SS-Panzer-Division "Totenkopf."



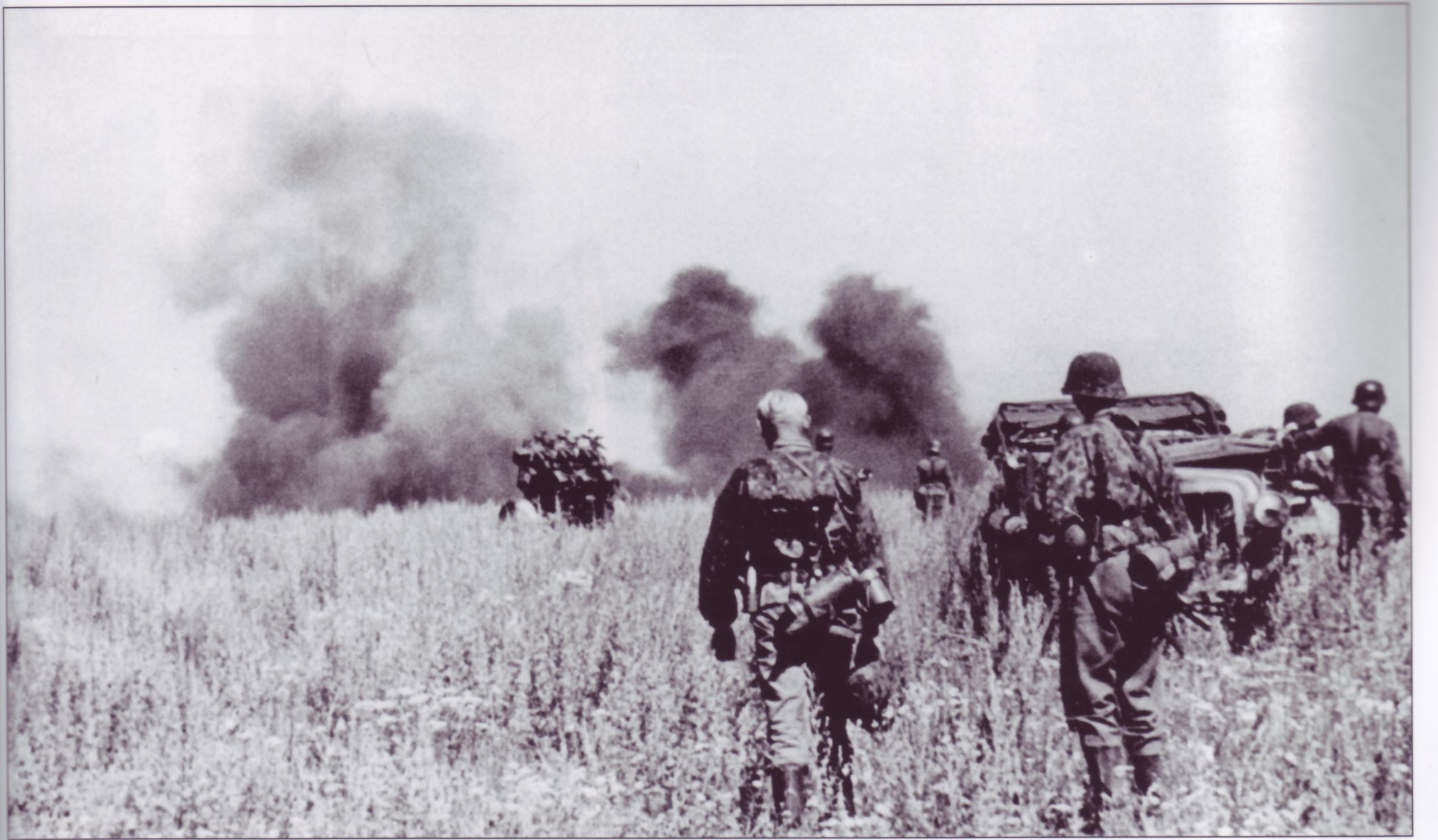
SS-Obersturmführer Walter Schmidt was decorated with the Knight's Cross on 4 August 1943 while serving in Panzergrenadier-Regiment 10 "Westland" in SS-Panzergrenadier-Division "Wiking". Schmidt, together with his men, was cut-off for several days at the Soviet bridgehead at Isjum, where they fought on until they were relieved by German troops breaking through the encirclement.

An SS-Schütze interrogates a talkative Soviet prisoner, August 1943. Information of immediate tactical value such as unit designation, strength, types of weapons, morale, and immediate plans were sought. The Waffen-SS soldier wears the new camouflage-pattern "Einheitsmütze" universal field cap.

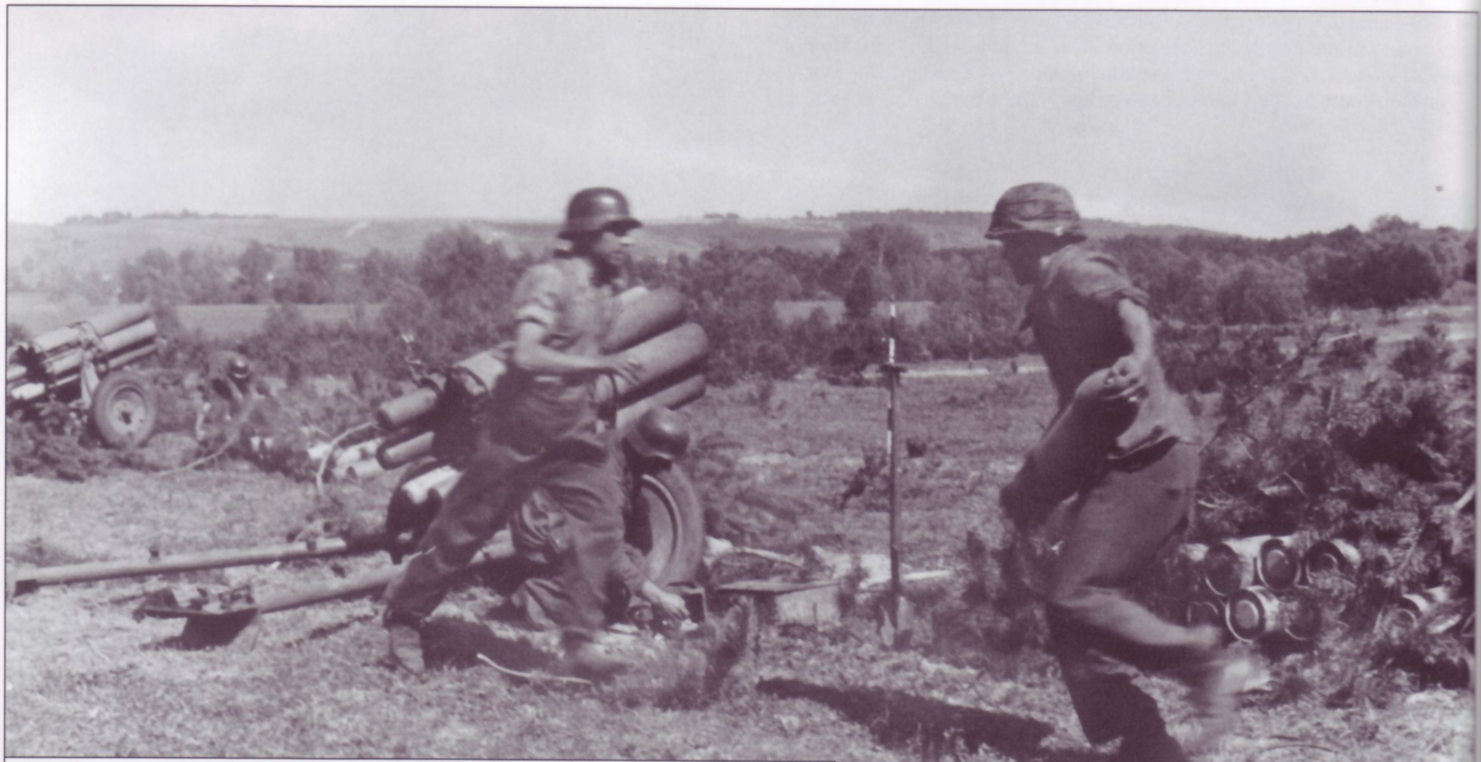




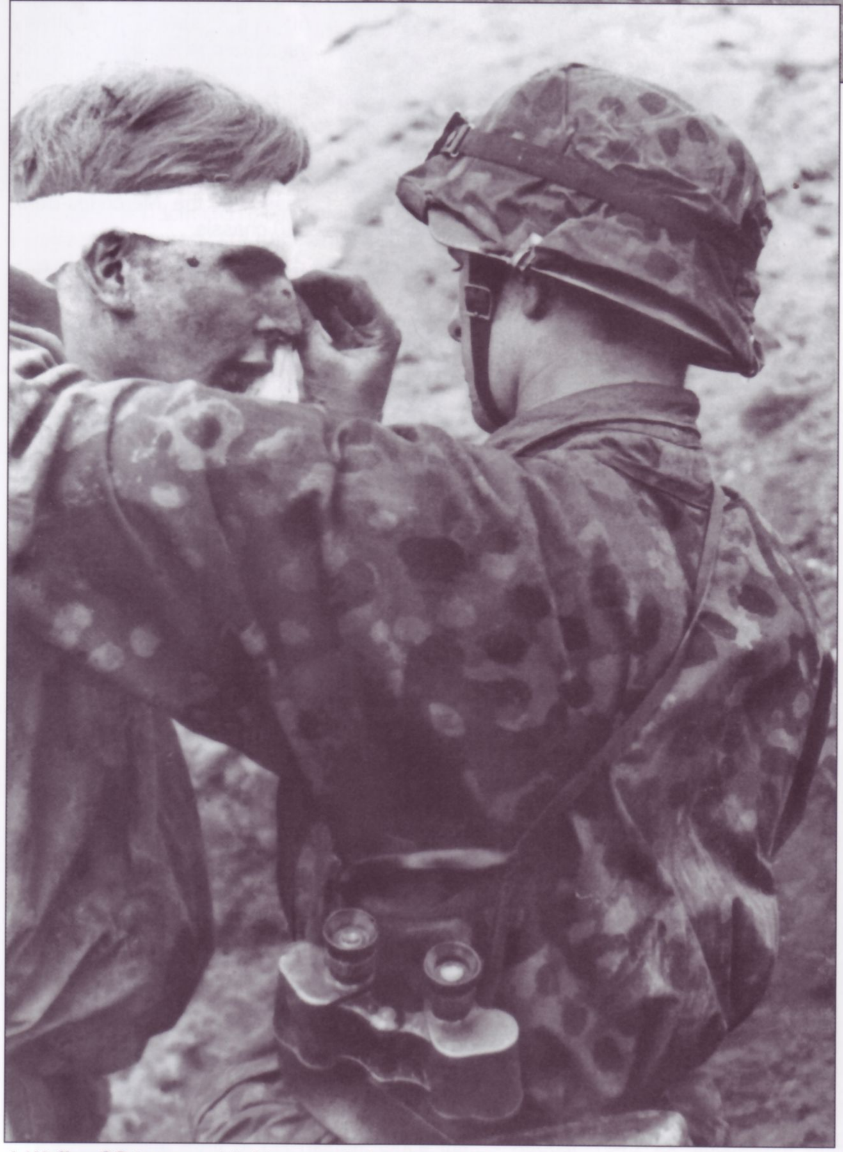
A Waffen-SS soldier watches a battery of rocket launchers fire off a salvo. Relatively inaccurate, they were ideal for area targets, and especially effective for breaking up enemy units when they concentrated for an attack. The vehicle is a Kfz.15 medium car, apparently based on the Mercedes-Benz 340 chassis.



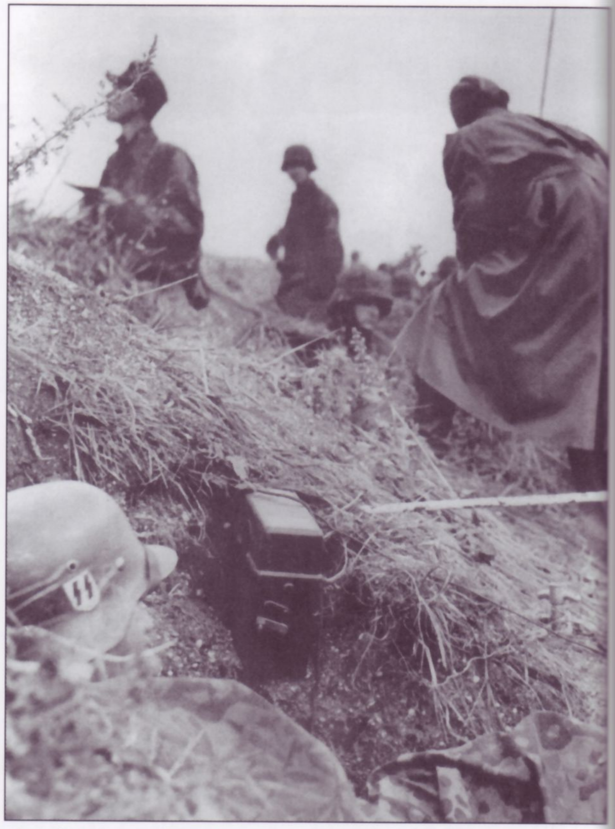
Soviet counter-battery fire impacts near a 28/32cm NbW41 rocket launcher. This launcher consisted of six racks mounted on a trailer capable of firing both types of rockets; the 28cm with its high-explosive warhead and the 32cm with its incendiary warhead. The launcher's towing vehicle, seen in the foreground, is a leichter Zugkraftwagen 1-ton Sd.Kfz.10 halftrack prime mover.



Waffen-SS Nebeltruppen (smoke troops) rush to reload their 15cm Nebelwerfer 41 rocket launchers. Speed was essential, as the battery would attempt to fire two or more salvos before displacing to avoid Soviet counter-battery fire. Note that the rocket's shipping canisters are camouflaged with pine boughs.

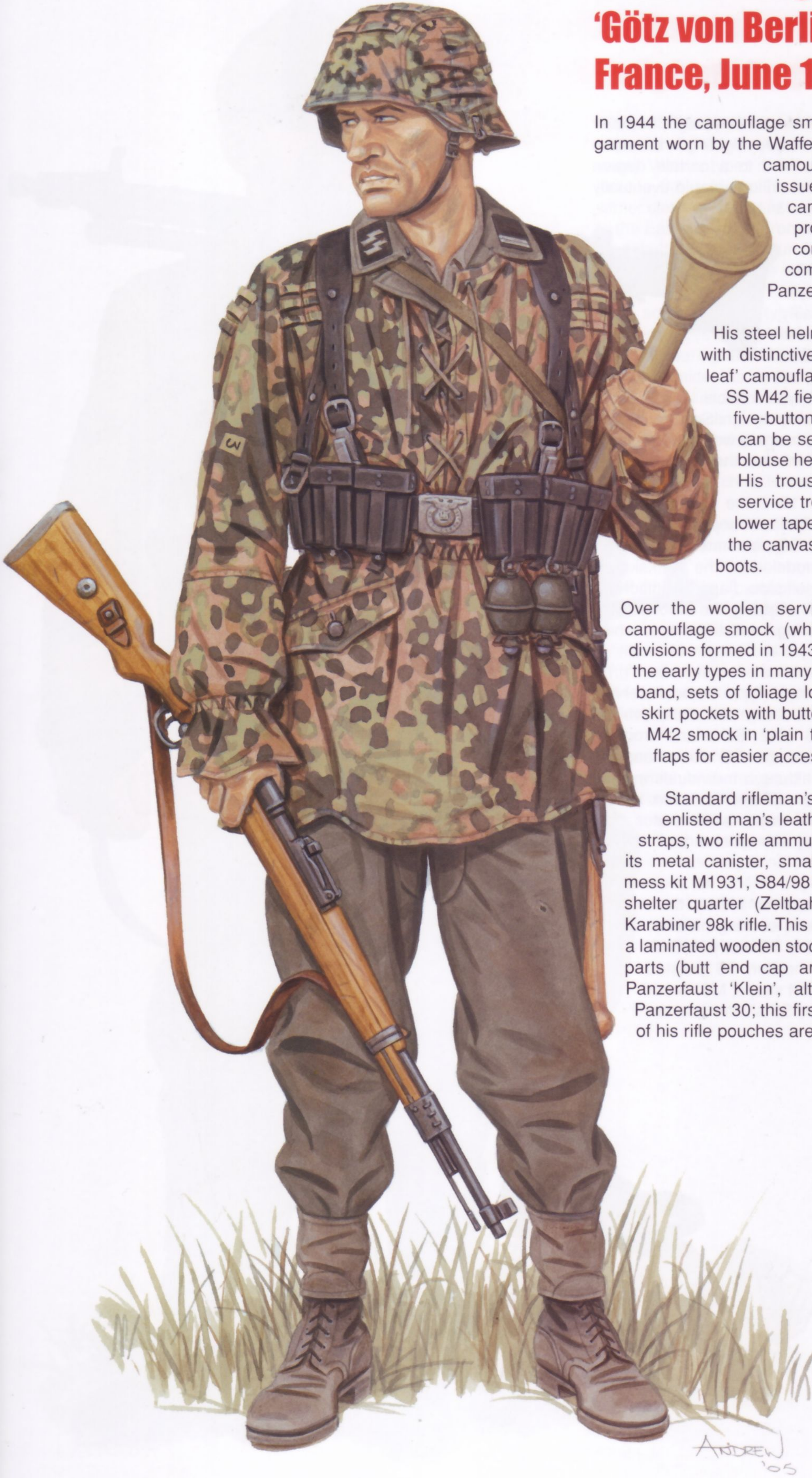


A Waffen-SS trooper aids his wounded comrade. The goggles on the front of his helmet probably indicate that he is assigned to a motorized unit. Standard 6x30 binoculars (Doppelfernrohr) are slung over his shoulder.



A unit command post on the reverse slope of a ridge, August 1943. In the foreground is a telephone operator with a standard Field Telephone M1933 (Feldfernsprecher 33), who sits on the edge of a slit trench. This telephone set weighed 12 pounds.

SS-Rottenführer, 17.SS-Panzergrenadier-Division 'Götz von Berlichingen', France, June 1944



In 1944 the camouflage smock was still the principal camouflage garment worn by the Waffen-SS. The M44 two-piece 'dot pattern' camouflage drill uniform was currently being issued as a replacement to the SS camouflage smock, but it was never produced in the numbers intended. This corporal in Normandy shows the most common appearance of the Waffen-SS Panzergrenadier in the fifth year of the war.

His steel helmet has an SS (2nd type) helmet cover with distinctive foliage loops (this one is in the 'oak leaf' camouflage pattern). His uniform consists of the SS M42 field blouse with typical plain pockets and five-button front; the usual SS collar patch insignia can be seen on the blouse. Underneath his field blouse he wears a standard issue field-grey shirt. His trousers are the M42 'Keilhose' pattern service trouser with its reinforced seat area and lower tapered legs & tie straps to accommodate the canvas gaiters and standard lace-up ankle boots.

Over the woolen service uniform he is wearing an M42 camouflage smock (which was standard issue to Waffen-SS divisions formed in 1943). This M42 type of smock differed from the early types in many ways, having a higher waist elasticated band, sets of foliage loops on the upper arms and body and skirt pockets with buttoned flaps. Seen here is the (2nd type) M42 smock in 'plain tree' camouflage with its angled pocket flaps for easier access to the skirt pockets.

Standard rifleman's equipment & weapons are issued, SS enlisted man's leather belt, M1939 leather infantry support straps, two rifle ammunition pouches, the M1938 gasmask in its metal canister, small entrenching tool, M1931 field flask, mess kit M1931, S84/98 bayonet, and M1931 bread bag and SS shelter quarter (Zeltbahn). He is holding the general issue Karabiner 98k rifle. This rifle model is a mid-war production with a laminated wooden stock, sight hood, and pressed sheet-metal parts (butt end cap and upper band). He also carries the Panzerfaust 'Klein', although superseded by the improved Panzerfaust 30; this first model was still used. Attached to one of his rifle pouches are two M39 egg grenades.

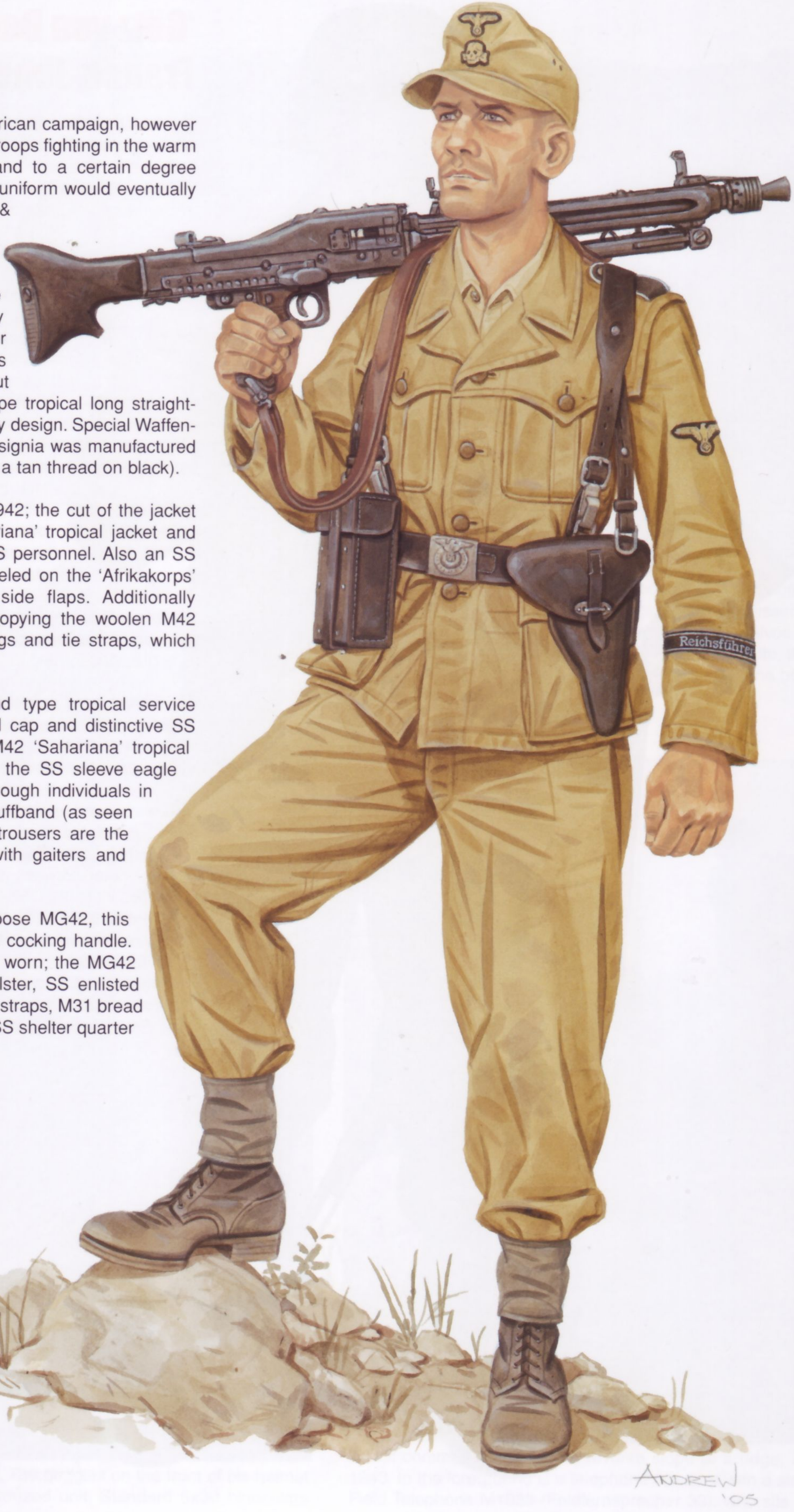
SS-Oberschütze, 16.SS-Panzergrenadier-Division 'Reichsführer-SS', Italy, August 1944

The Waffen-SS did not take part in the African campaign, however a tropical uniform was necessary for their troops fighting in the warm climate of the Mediterranean, Balkans and to a certain degree Southern Russia. The Waffen-SS tropical uniform would eventually take a different approach to the Heeres & Luftwaffen designs, but their first type uniform borrowed features from both of these branches. For example the SS tropical uniform copied the Luftwaffen style using the same tan color, high quality cotton fabric and tropical side cap. However the cut of the first type SS tropical tunic was similar to the M1941 tropical Army type, but with non-pleated hip pockets. The first type tropical long straight-legged trouser was also based on the army design. Special Waffen-SS cap, sleeve eagle and rank chevron insignia was manufactured for the tropical uniform (machine woven in a tan thread on black).

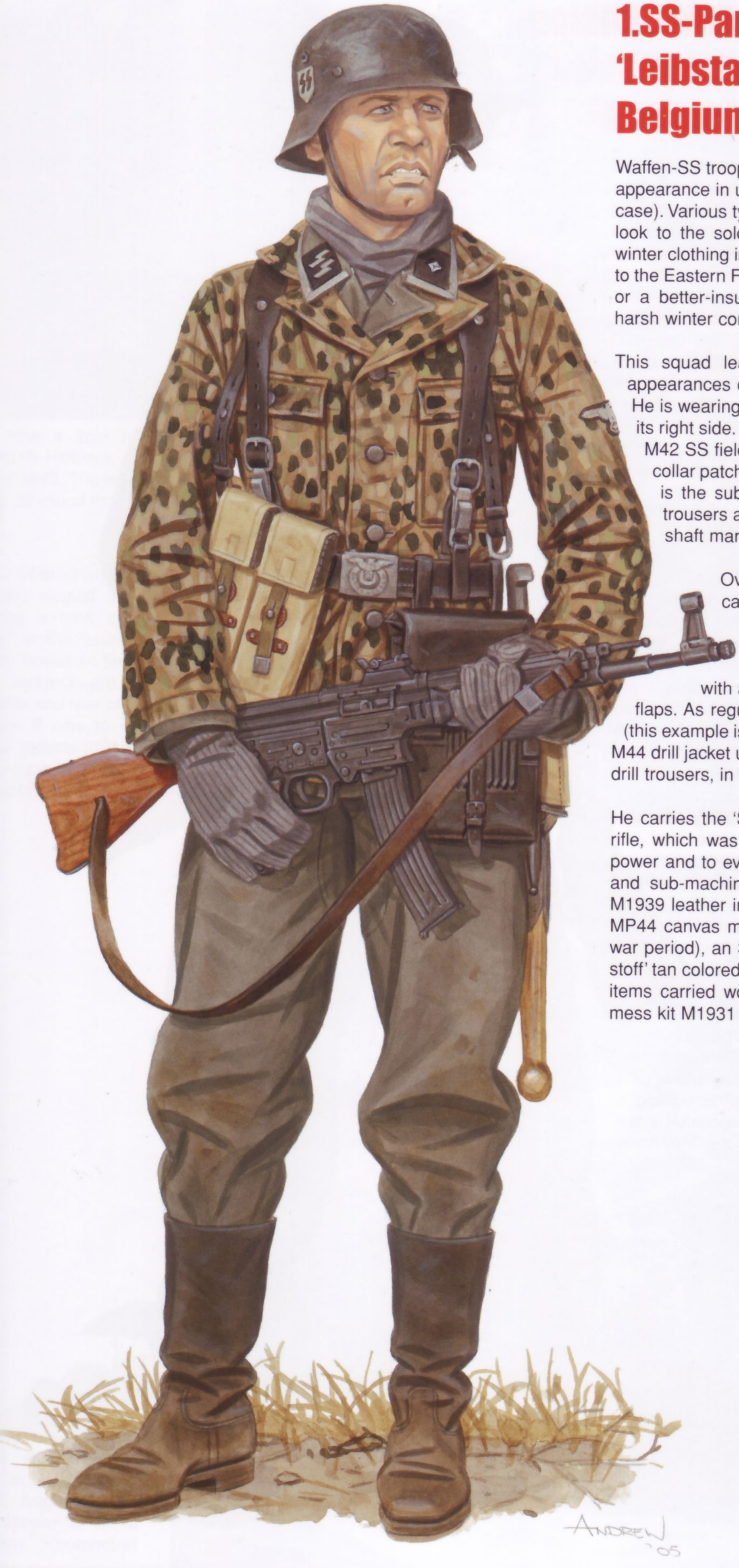
A second SS design was introduced in 1942; the cut of the jacket followed the stylish looking Italian 'Sahariana' tropical jacket and proved to be very popular with Waffen-SS personnel. Also an SS tropical visored field cap was worn (modeled on the 'Afrikakorps' type field cap) but without the false side flaps. Additionally introduced was a new tropical trouser copying the woolen M42 'Keilhose' service trouser with tapered legs and tie straps, which held the trouser to the ankle boot.

This machine gunner wears the second type tropical service uniform, with an SS tropical visored field cap and distinctive SS insignia. The jacket is the Waffen-SS M42 'Sahariana' tropical jacket. Commonly the rank insignia and the SS sleeve eagle insignia was only worn on this tunic, although individuals in some cases added their own divisional cuffband (as seen here) and SS black collar patches. The trousers are the M42 'Keilhose' tropical service trouser with gaiters and lace-up ankle boots.

Slung over his shoulder is the multi-purpose MG42, this model is the early type with its horizontal cocking handle. Standard machine gunner's equipment is worn; the MG42 toolbox, a P38 pistol in its 'hardshell' holster, SS enlisted man's belt, M1939 leather infantry support straps, M31 bread bag, M31 field flask, mess kit M1931 and SS shelter quarter (Zeltbahn).



SS-Unterscharführer, 1.SS-Panzer-Division 'Leibstandarte Adolf Hitler', Belgium, December 1944



Waffen-SS troops in the Ardennes offensive demonstrated a diverse appearance in uniform (photographic evidence shows this to be the case). Various types of SS uniforms were worn giving a "mixed bag" look to the soldiers. There was also a lack of proper Waffen-SS winter clothing issued in this campaign (priority for this clothing went to the Eastern Front). Troops were only issued with a bulky greatcoat or a better-insulated surcoat for protection against the cold and harsh winter conditions on the western front of 1944/45.

This squad leader typifies one of the many diverse uniform appearances of the Waffen-SS soldier in the last year of the war. He is wearing an M42 SS steel helmet with only one SS decal on its right side. His woolen field-grey service uniform consists of the M42 SS field blouse with a black SS rune collar patch and rank collar patch insignia. Around the edging of his field blouse collar is the subdued war pattern NCO grey 'Tresse'. The service trousers are also the M42 type tucked into a pair of rare short shaft marching boots.

Over his field blouse he wears the M44 (dot pattern) camouflage drill jacket. The camouflage drill jacket was manufactured as a replacement to the camouflage smock in the late war years. It was made to the same design as the M43 field blouse; with a five-button front, plain pockets and straight pocket flaps. As regulations stipulate only the SS sleeve eagle insignia (this example is the subdued grey type) is worn on the left arm. The M44 drill jacket usually came with a pair of (dot pattern) camouflage drill trousers, in this case they have not been issued.

He carries the 'Sturmgewehr 44' also known as the MP44 assault rifle, which was designed to give the German soldier greater fire power and to eventually replace other German manufactured rifles and sub-machine guns. His personal equipment consists of the M1939 leather infantry support straps, SS enlisted man's belt, one MP44 canvas magazine pouch (as was often the case in the late war period), an S84/98 bayonet, small entrenching tool in a 'press-stoff' tan colored carrier and the M1935 map case. Other equipment items carried would be the M1931 bread bag, M1931 field flask, mess kit M1931 and SS shelter quarter (Zeltbahn).

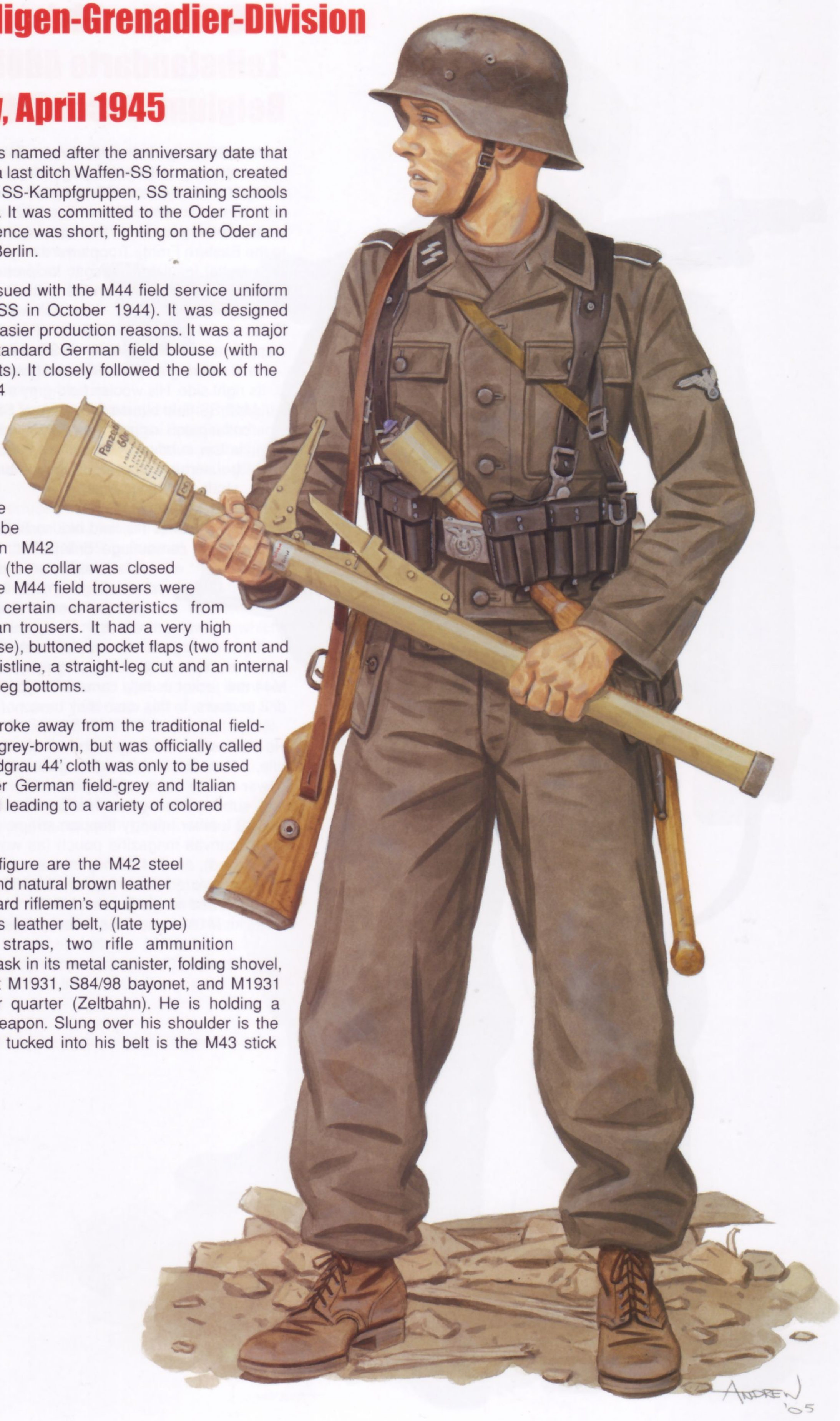
SS-Schütze, 32.SS-Freiwilligen-Grenadier-Division '30 Januar', East Germany, April 1945

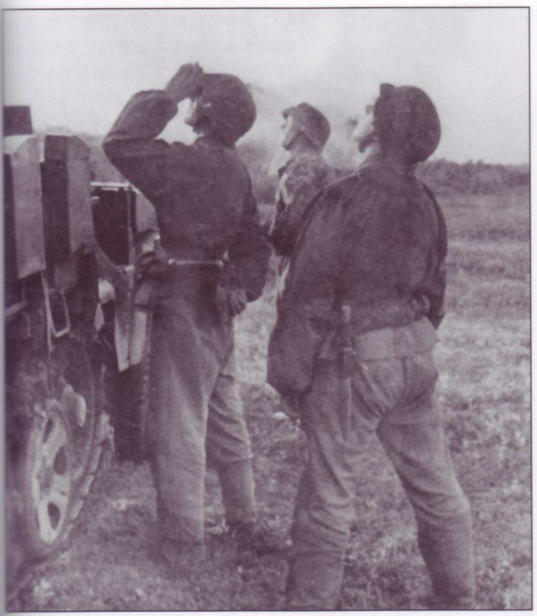
The '30 Januar' division was named after the anniversary date that Hitler took power. This was a last ditch Waffen-SS formation, created in January 1945 by various SS-Kampfgruppen, SS training schools and SS recruitment depots. It was committed to the Oder Front in February that year. Its existence was short, fighting on the Oder and in the battles southeast of Berlin.

This young SS recruit is issued with the M44 field service uniform (introduced to the Waffen-SS in October 1944). It was designed purely for economical and easier production reasons. It was a major shift in design from the standard German field blouse (with no blouse skirt and hip pockets). It closely followed the look of the British battledress. The M44 field blouse was short, only coming to waist-length, with two deep chest pockets. It was also manufactured in a five or six button front. The blouse collar was designed to be worn open and with an M42 turtleneck woolen sweater (the collar was closed only when necessary). The M44 field trousers were also redesigned, taking certain characteristics from previous models of German trousers. It had a very high waist (due to the short blouse), buttoned pocket flaps (two front and two rear), a cloth belted waistline, a straight-leg cut and an internal draw strap to gather in the leg bottoms.

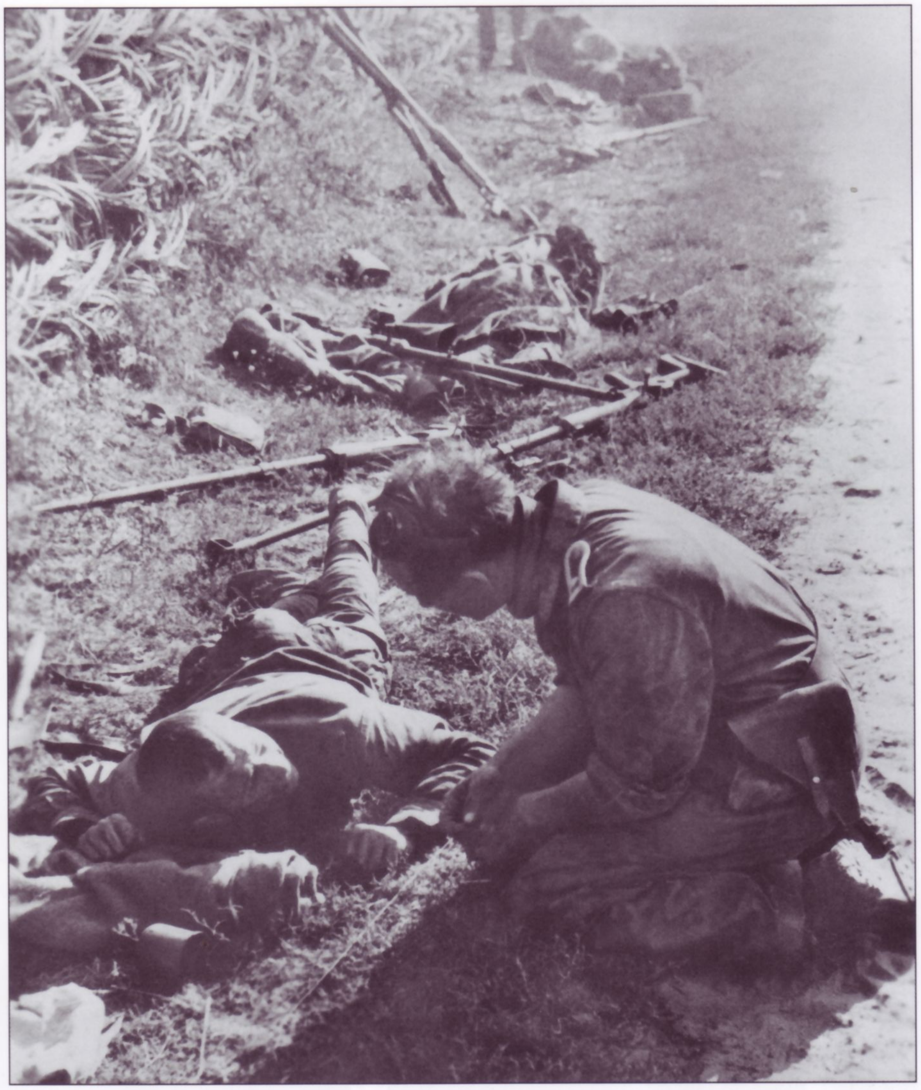
This new uniform's color broke away from the traditional field-grey and was now a drab grey-brown, but was officially called 'Feldgrau 44'. Although 'Feldgrau 44' cloth was only to be used on this uniform, other older German field-grey and Italian stocks of cloth were utilized leading to a variety of colored M44 uniforms.

Other items worn on this figure are the M42 steel helmet (devoid of decals) and natural brown leather lace-up ankle boots. Standard riflemen's equipment is worn; SS enlisted man's leather belt, (late type) leather infantry support straps, two rifle ammunition pouches, the M1938 gasmask in its metal canister, folding shovel, M1931 field flask, mess kit M1931, S84/98 bayonet, and M1931 bread bag and SS shelter quarter (Zeltbahn). He is holding a Panzerfaust 60 anti-tank weapon. Slung over his shoulder is the late type Kar 98k rifle and tucked into his belt is the M43 stick grenade.

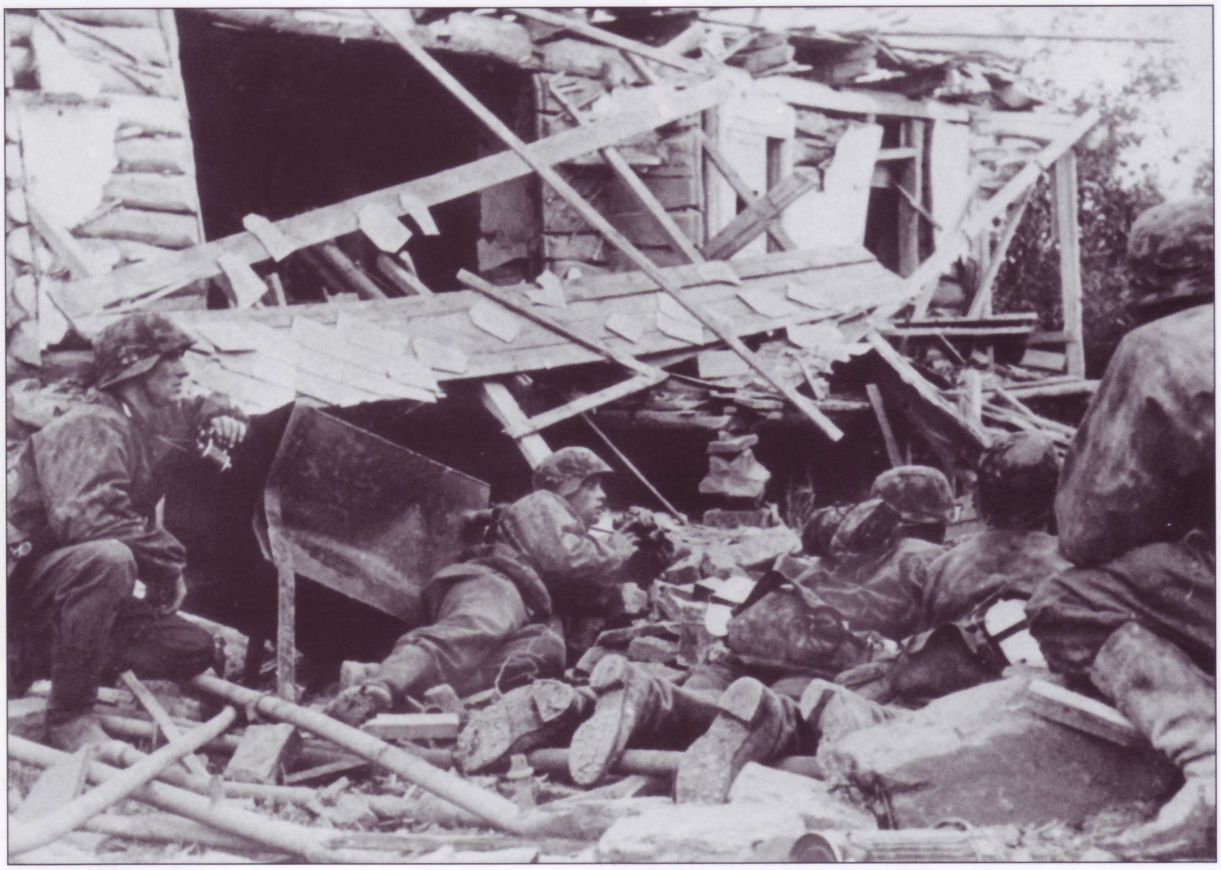




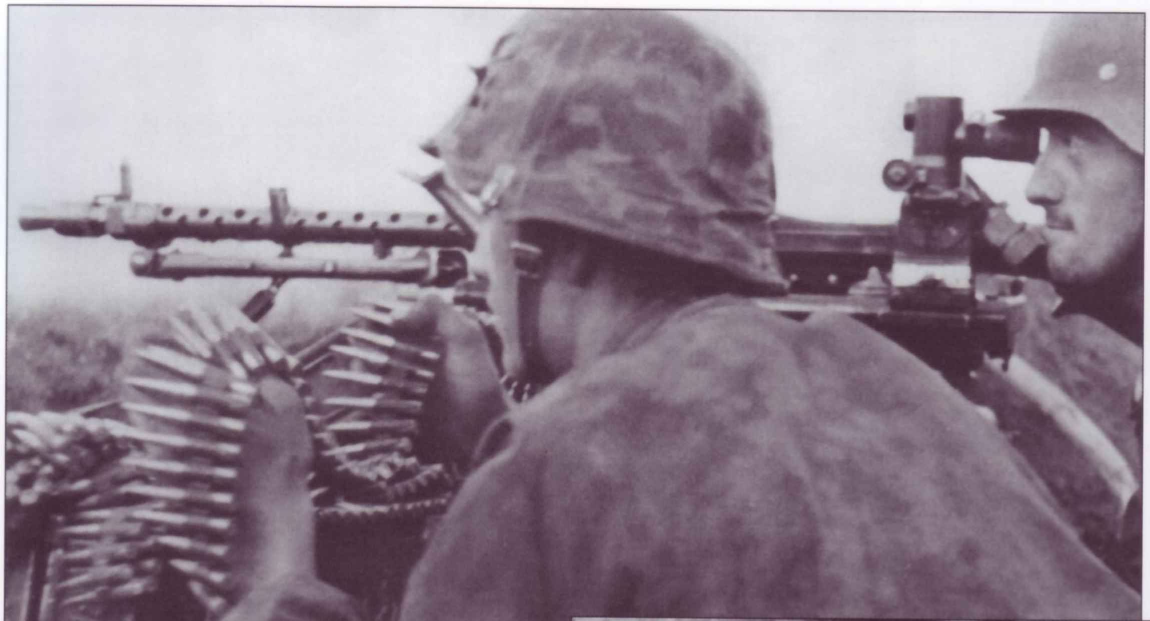
The crew a 2cm anti-aircraft gun mounted on an Sd.Kfz.10 halftrack scans the sky for enemy aircraft, August 1943. The boxes on the side of the vehicle each hold a 20-round magazine for the gun.



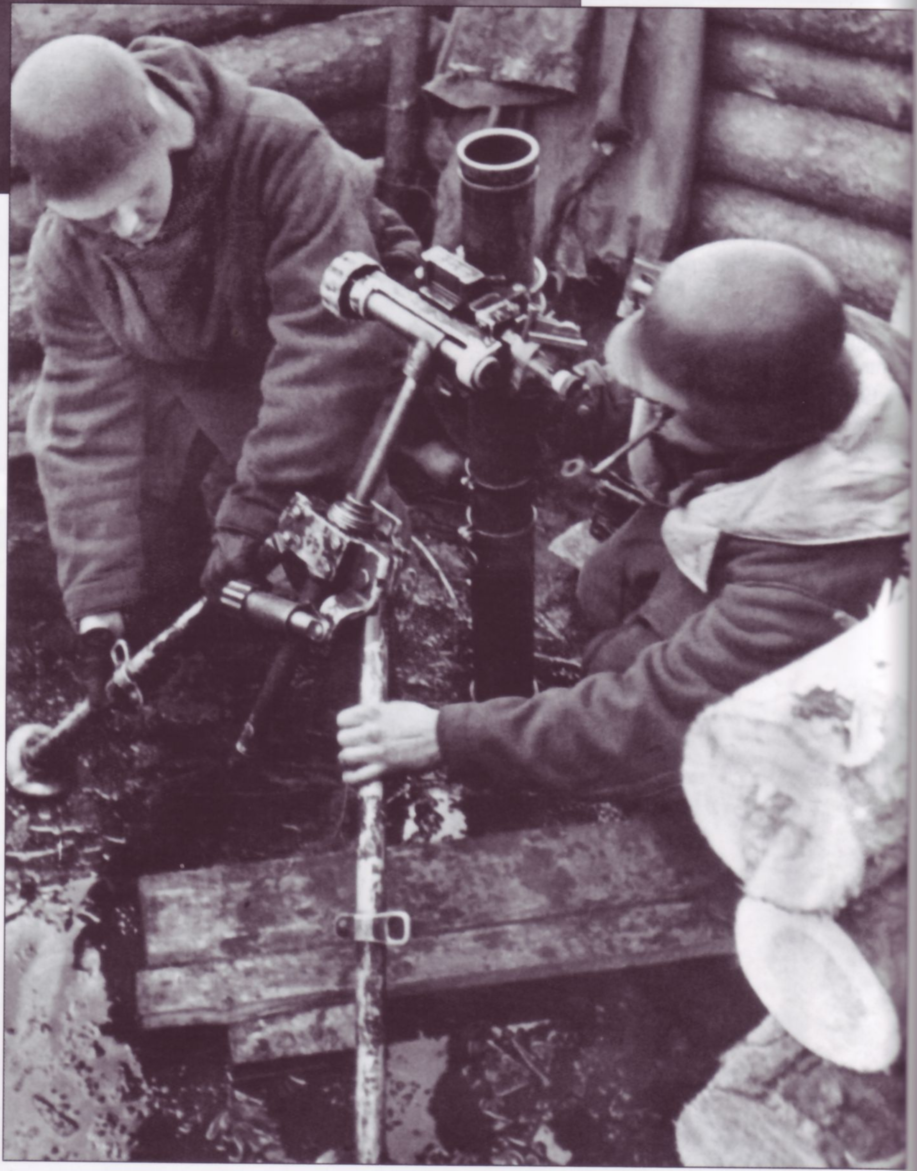
An SS-Oberscharführer interrogates a wounded Soviet prisoner, August 1943. It appears the SS man is wearing a tank crewmembers camouflage overall printed in the "palm" pattern. In the background are several Soviet 14.5mm PTRD-41 anti-tank rifles. While heavy and awkward, they proved to be effective against the sides and rear of many German tanks, including the Panther. It was to counter this weapon, not hollow-charge rockets from American "Bazookas" (as is often erroneously reported) that the Germans mounted "Schützen" skirt armor panels on their tanks and assault guns.



A group of officers and NCOs take cover amidst a collapsed house in the southern USSR, August 1943. They appear to be a company command group.

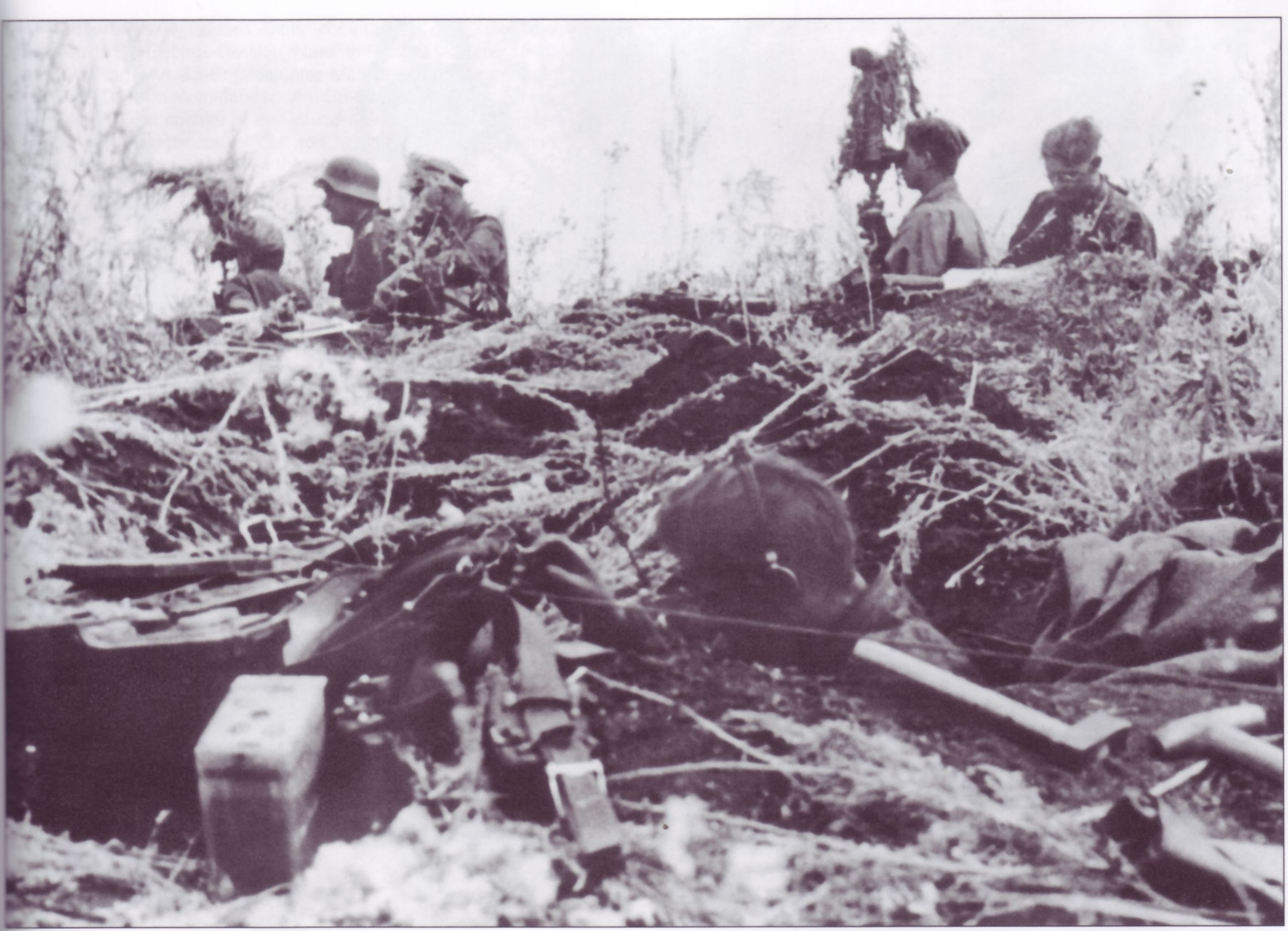


A 7.92mm MG34 heavy machine-gun crew, autumn 1943. Heavy machine-gun crews were provided with a tripod M1934, optical sight M1934, and extra spare barrel containers.



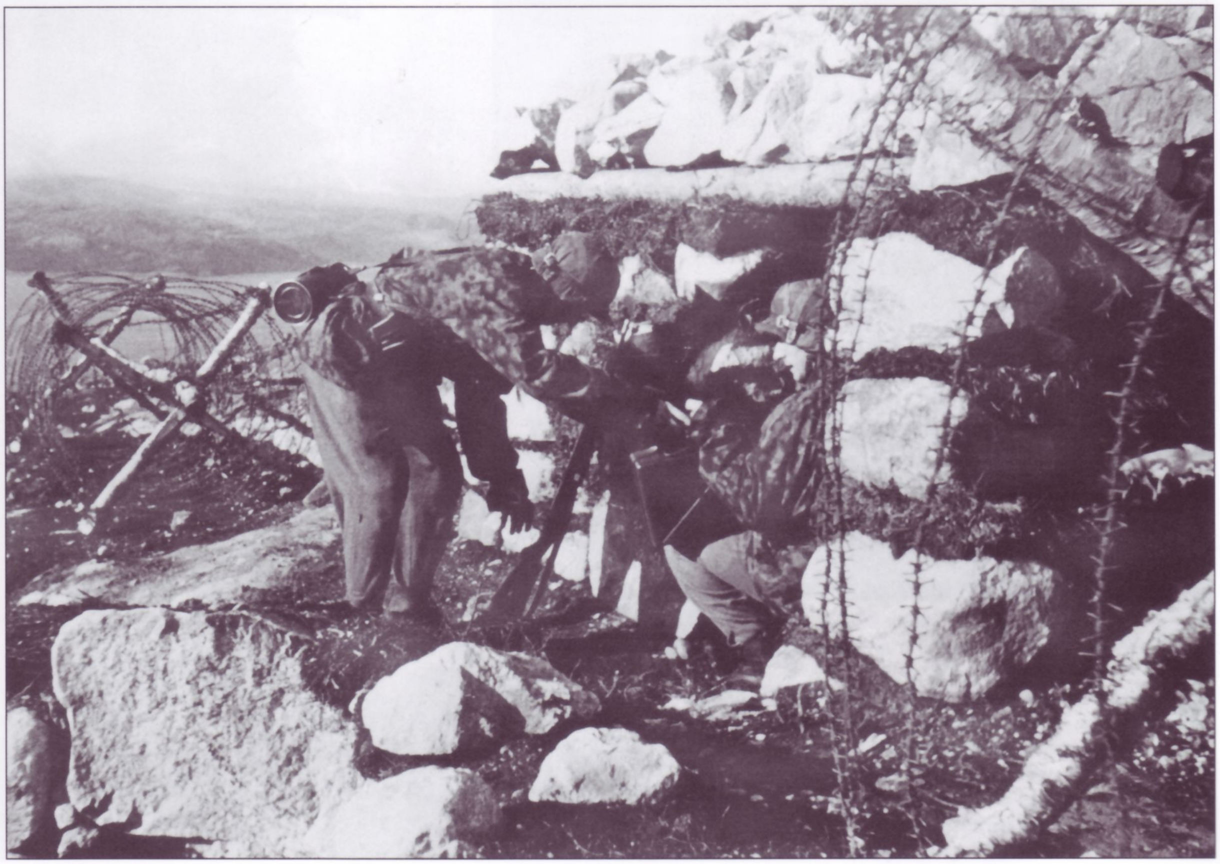
Another weapon equipping the battalion machine gun company was the 8cm m.Gw.34 medium mortar (mittlerer Granatwerfer). Six armed the company's mortar platoon. The Russians used the similar 82mm mortar, which could fire German 8cm ammunition (actually 81mm), but the Germans could not fire Russian ammunition. The Germans did use large numbers of captured Russian mortars though and fired their own and Russian ammunition. This Granatwerfernest appears to be above ground or just partly below ground and has an open front allowing a clear field of fire. Even if above ground the pine logs provided some protection for light shell fragments.

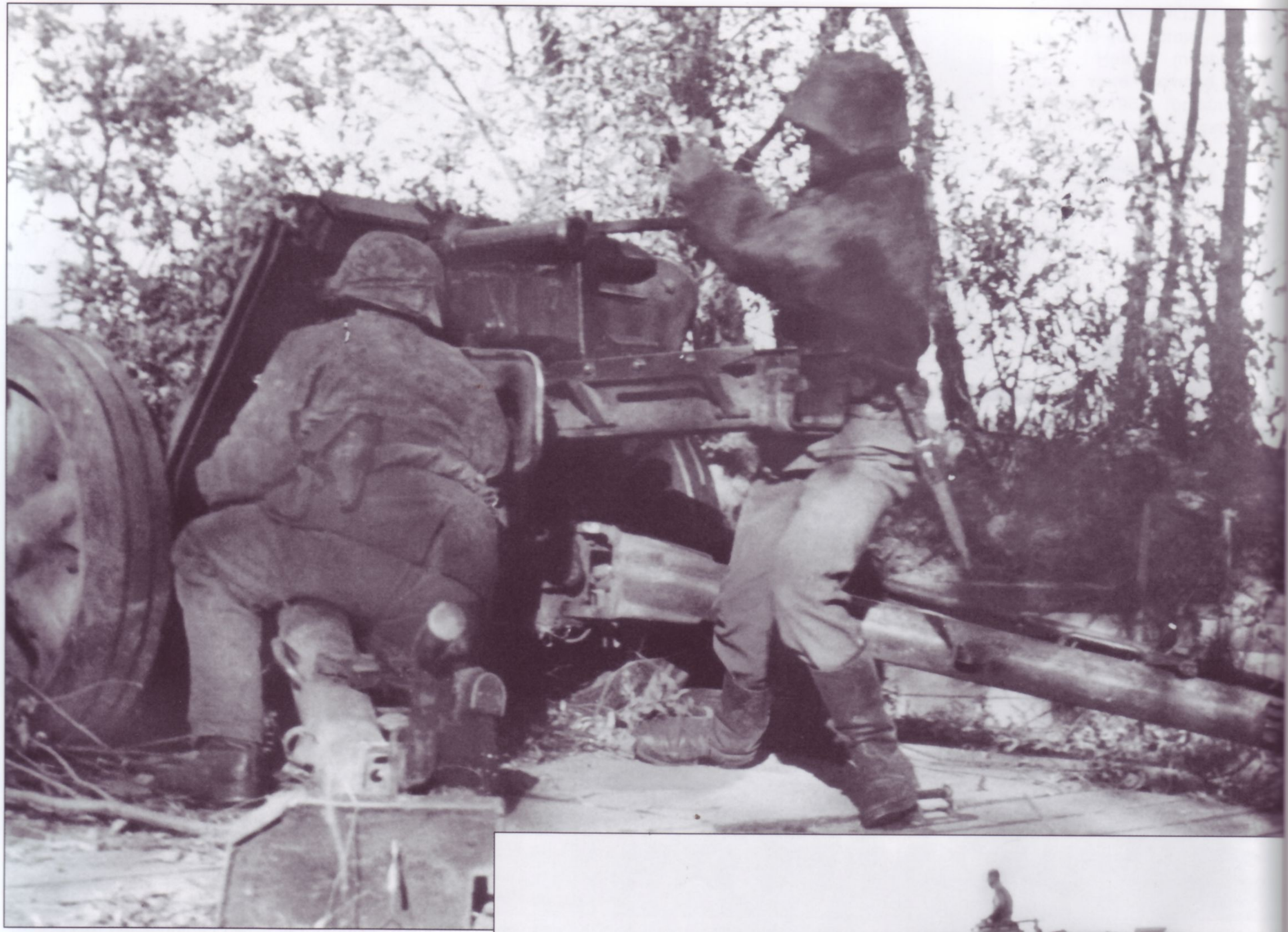
A Waffen-SS band performs for the troops aboard a ferry crossing the Dnieper River in Ukraine, autumn 1943. Exposure to martial music, as well as traditional German songs, was considered an important morale builder.



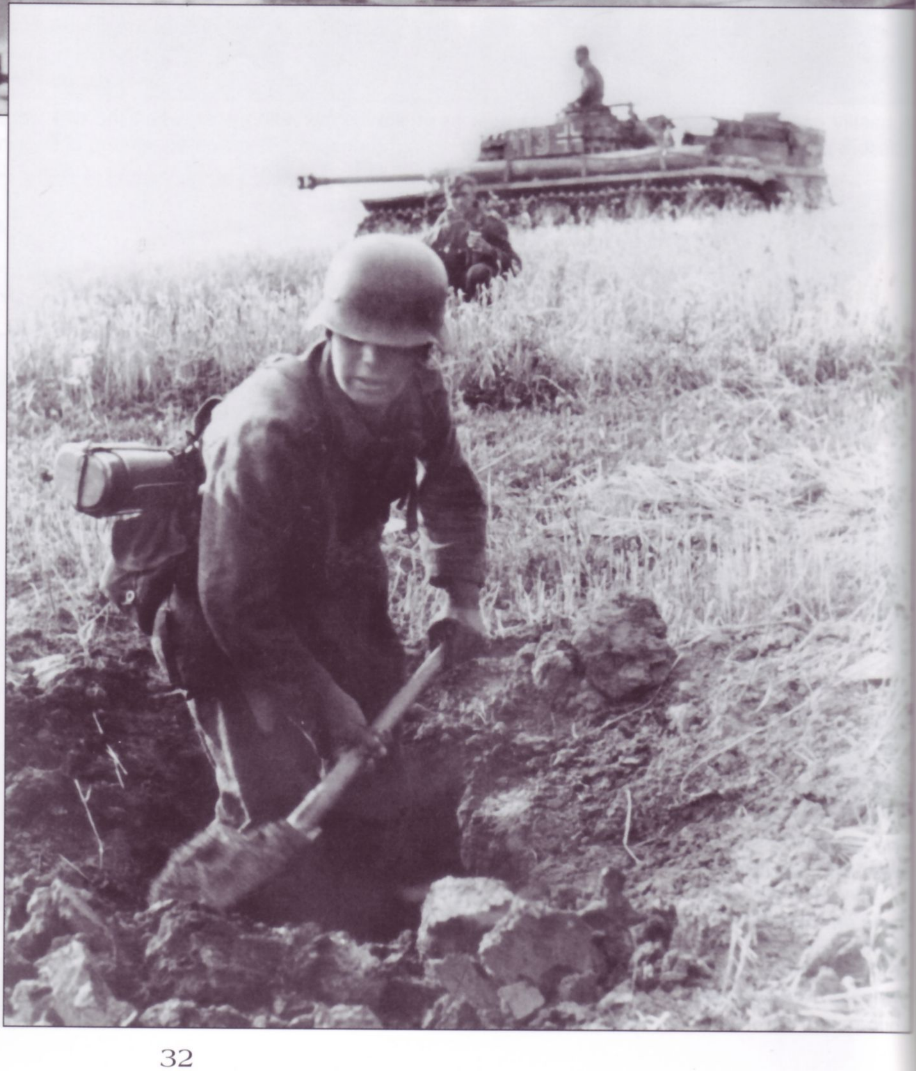
A hastily camouflaged forward command post or artillery observation post (often the two were combined), autumn 1943. Two camouflaged 6x30 Sf14Z scissors periscopes (Scherenfernrohr) can be seen in the position. Assorted equipment is strewn about in the foreground.

An SS-Gebirgs-Division "Nord" combat patrol checks out abandoned Soviet bunkers near Murmansk, northern USSR, autumn 1943. The bunker is built of logs and rocks with layers of turf set between the rocks to weatherproof the shelter. Note the portable barbed-wire knife-rest obstacles.



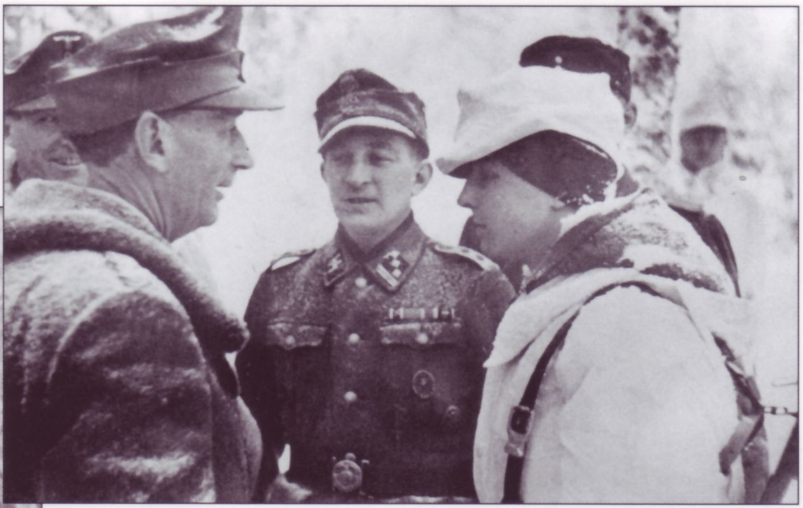


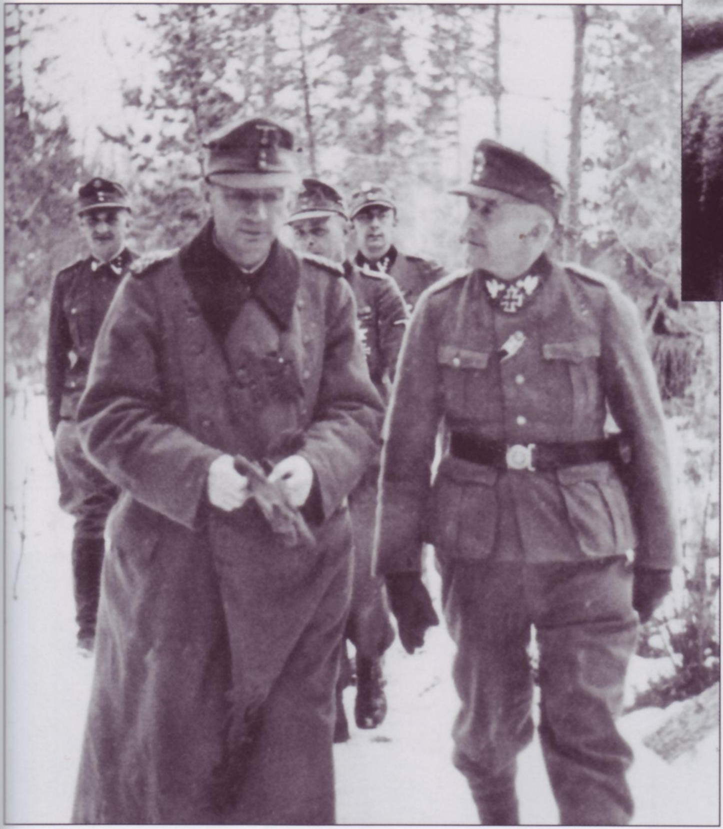
Gunners prepare their 7.5cm PaK40 anti-tank gun for action, autumn 1943. This heavy weapon equipped divisional and non-divisional Panzerabwehrabteilungen (armor defense battalions). The gun shield is double layered with an air space in between, for improved ballistic protection while keeping the weight down. Note the doors removed from a house used to cover a slit trench beneath the gun. Positioning the trench inside the gun's spread trails allowed the crew to immediately pile in when counter-fire was received.

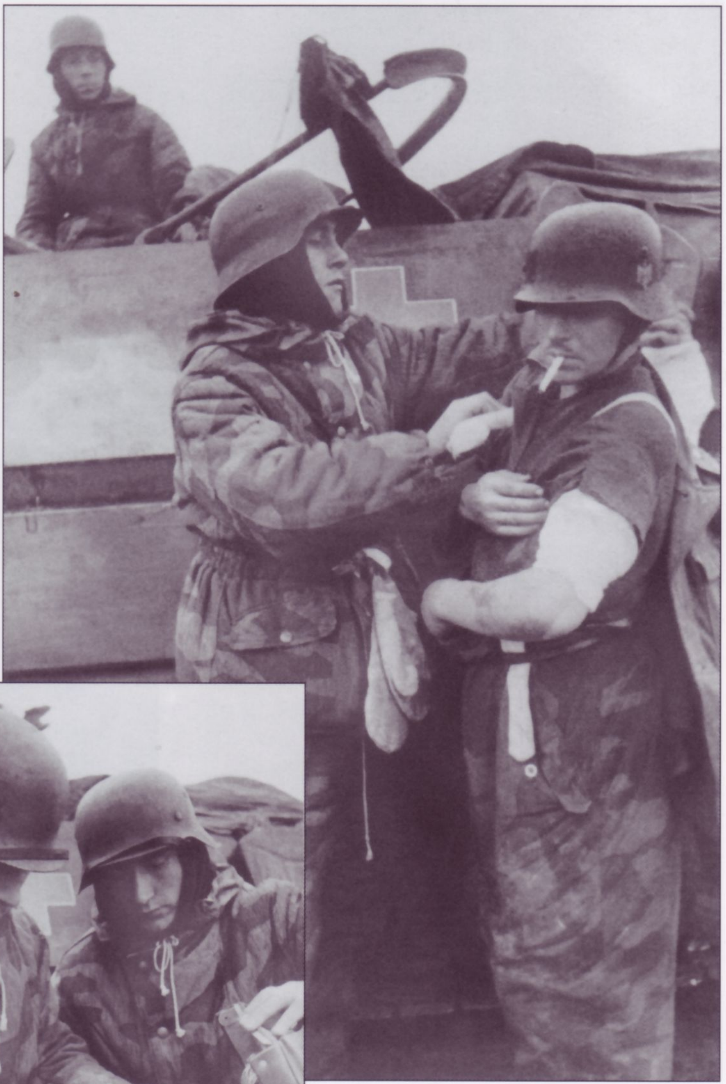


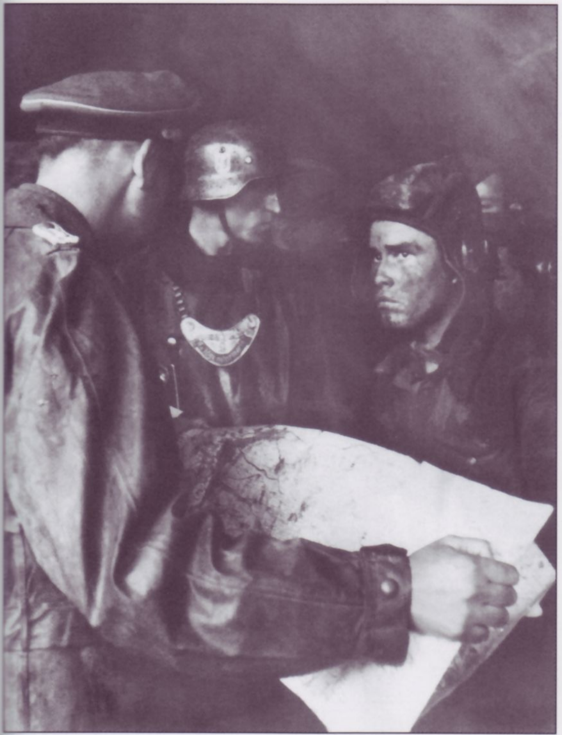
An infantryman digs in as a StuG III passes. He is using a larger and more effective shovel than the small entrenching tool he carries. This was probably commandeered from a farm. Officially called a Schützenloch (rifleman's hole or firing hole), the one- and two-man fighting positions were known to the German soldier as a Wolfsgrabhügel (wolf's barrow).

Army Generaloberst Eduard Dietl, commander of 20.Gebirgs-Armee, visits SS-Gebirgs-Division "Nord" in Finland, Autumn 1943. Dietl is walking with SS-Brigadeführer Matthias Kleinheisterkamp, the "Nord" Division commander. An SS-Obersturmführer listens attentively as Dietl speaks to one of his men. Dietl was a highly-regarded mountain troops officer and had commanded German forces at Narvik, Norway early in the war.

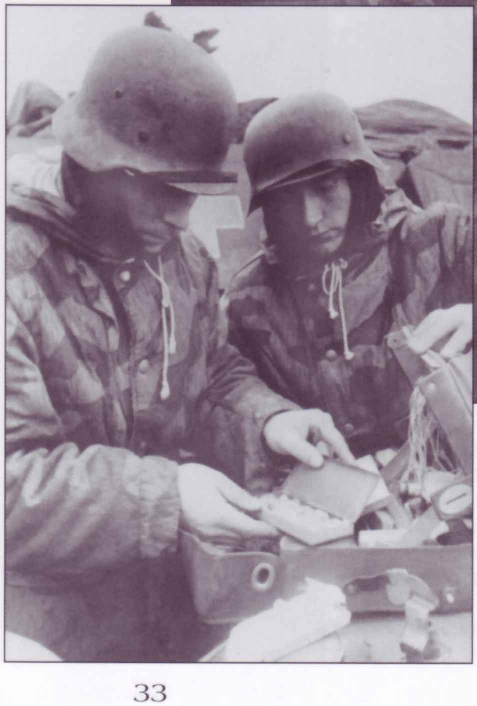






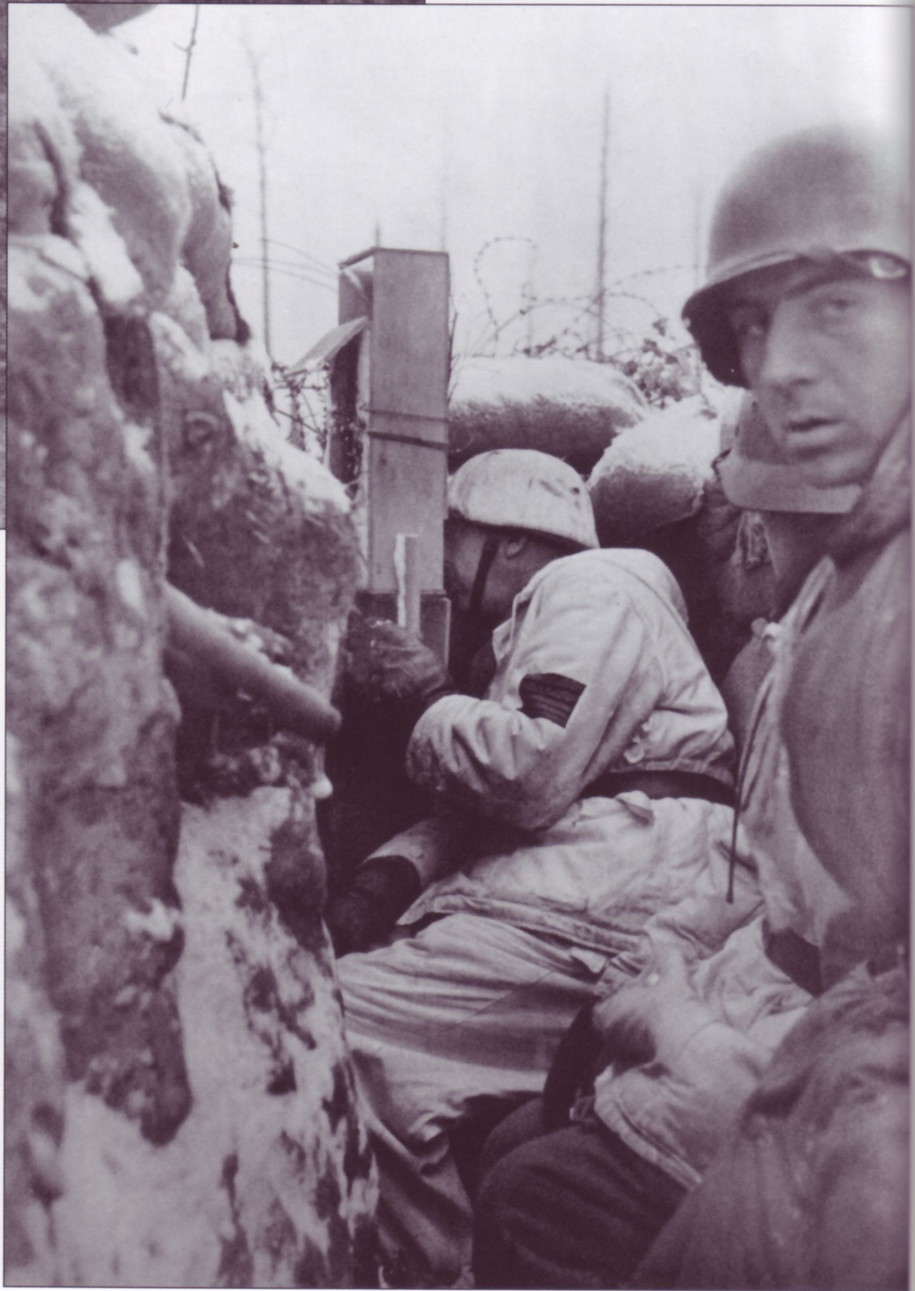


An SS officer accompanied by a Feldgendarmerie (military policeman), identifiable by his Gorgot plate, question the survivors of a Soviet tank crew, October 1943. The officer, possibly an SS-Untersturmführer, wears a field gray leather greatcoat. While the shape and basic design remained the same, the details differed on the Gorgot plates, depending on the wearer's service affiliation.



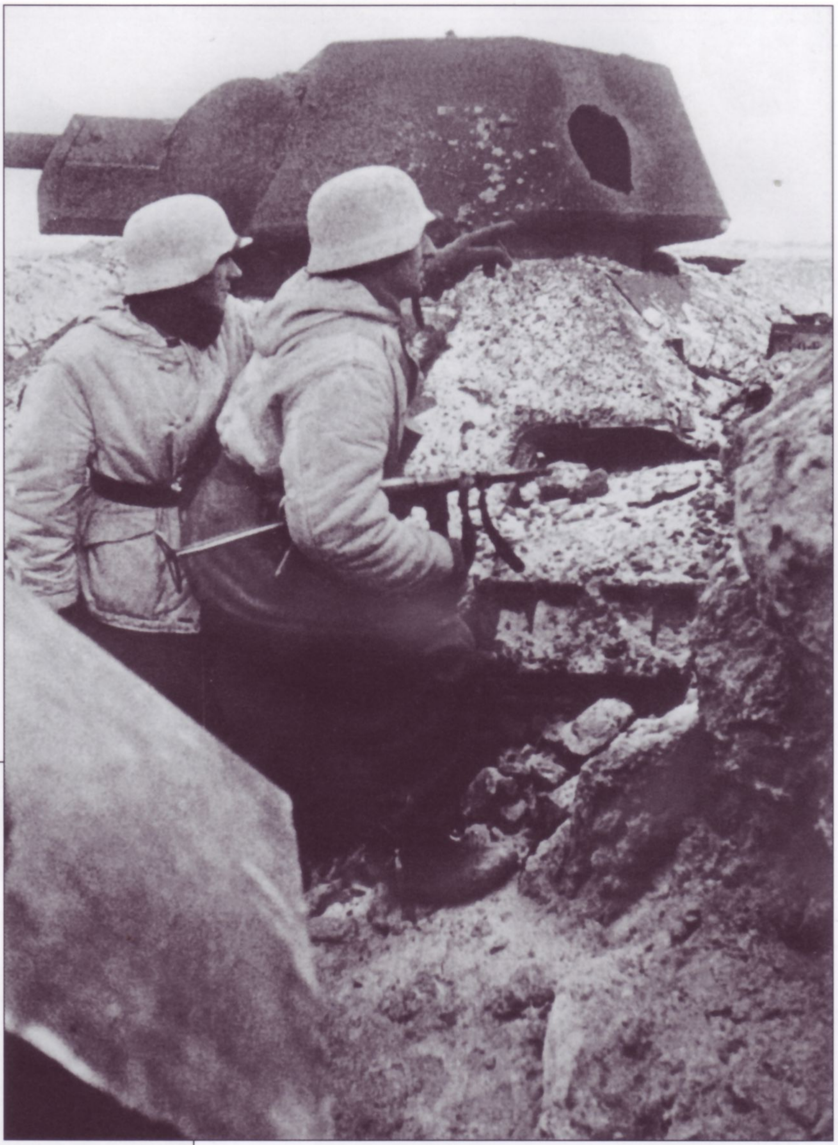
A Sanitäter (sanitation soldier—medical aidman) treats a wounded soldier using a well-outfitted medical kit. Soldiers referred to the Sanitäter as a Sani. These soldiers wear the Heeres-developed winter insulated suit with the three-color (light green, medium green, dark brown) splinter camouflage side out. Behind them is an Sd.Kfz.251 halftrack.

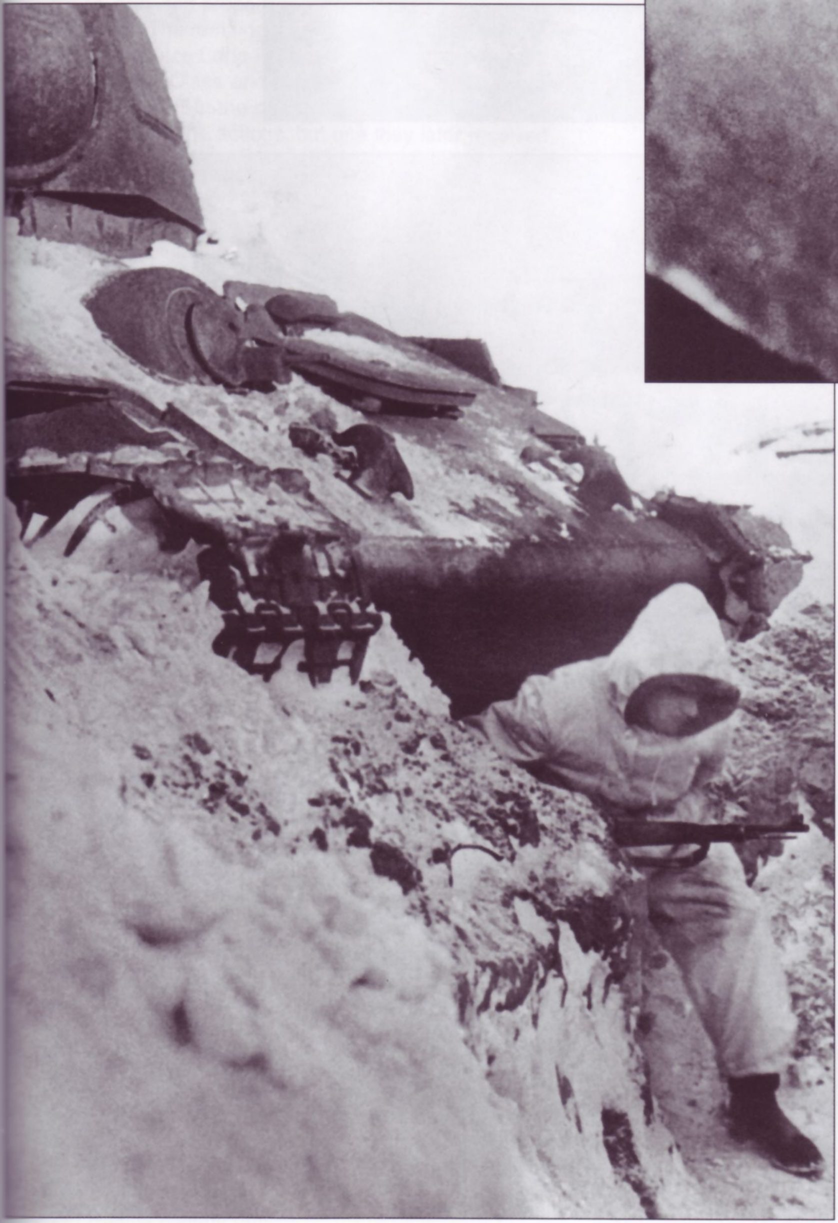
1.SS-Panzer-Division “LAH” troops press past a burning T-34 tank near Zhitomir, December 1943. They wear the insulated winter jacket with its large fur-lined hood and boots. One man is armed with a 7.92mm MG42 machine-gun.



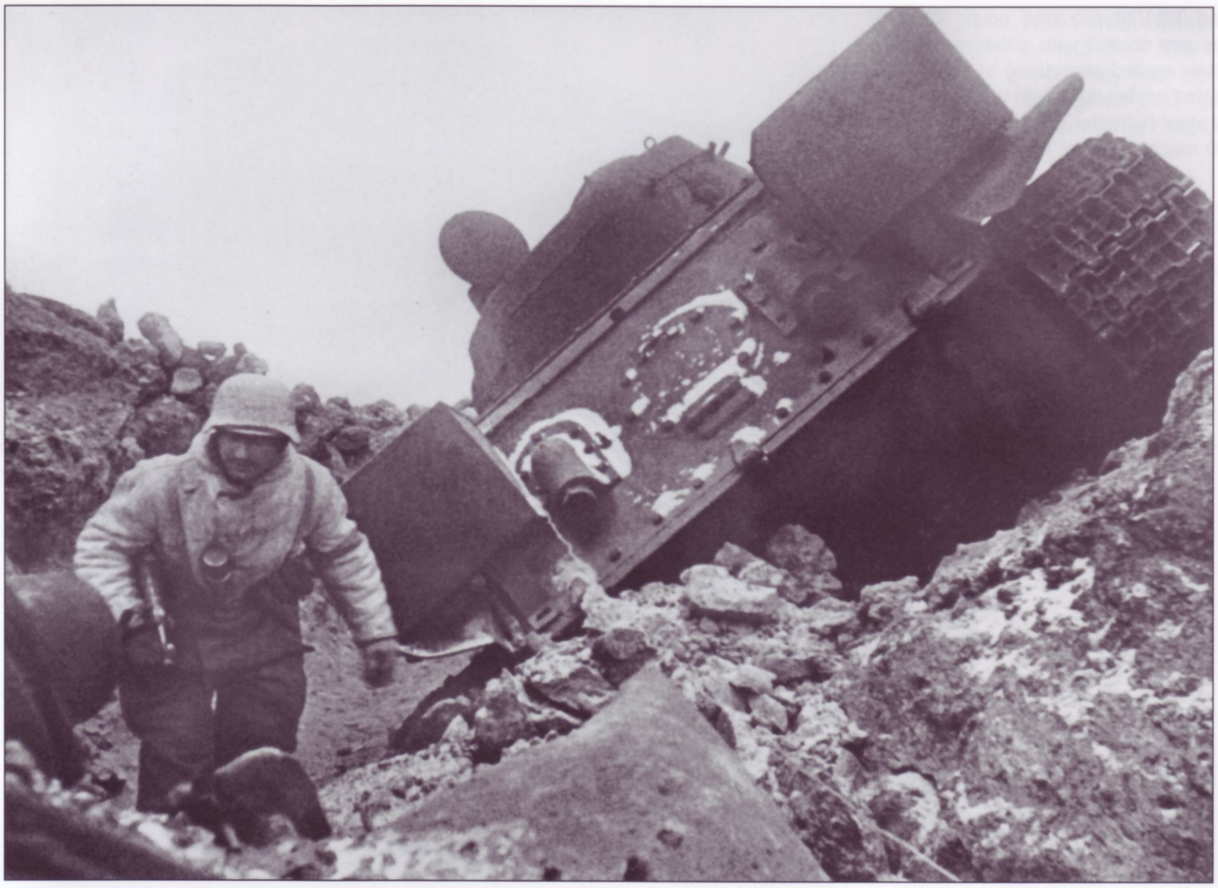
Reminiscent of World War I, an SS-Standartenführer, equivalent to a Heeres Oberst or colonel, views the Russian lines to gain an understanding of their layout and strength. His rank is indicated on his reversible insulated winter suit by the light green on black arm insignia. These were used by both the Waffen-SS and Heer on all camouflage uniforms and worn only on the left sleeve. More often than not the insignia were not available.

A catastrophically destroyed T-34/76 provides cover for two grenadiers. The tank's sides are coated with snow and fallen ash. Gray smudged ash often coated everything in cities and towns. Both men wear insulated winter suits with the white-side out along with whitewashed steel helmets. The man to the right is armed with a 9mm MP40 machine pistol and a Stg.24 stick hand grenade.

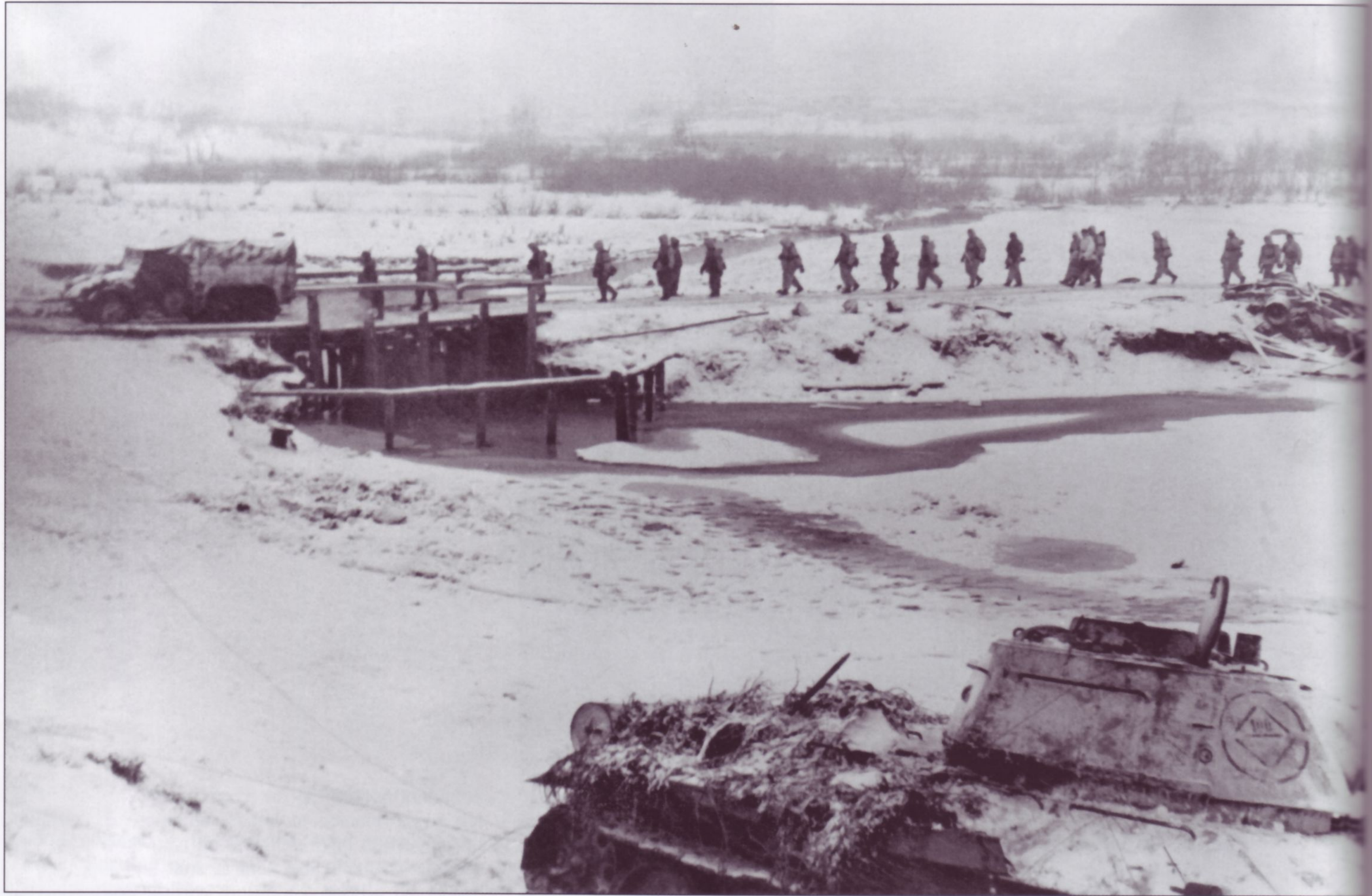




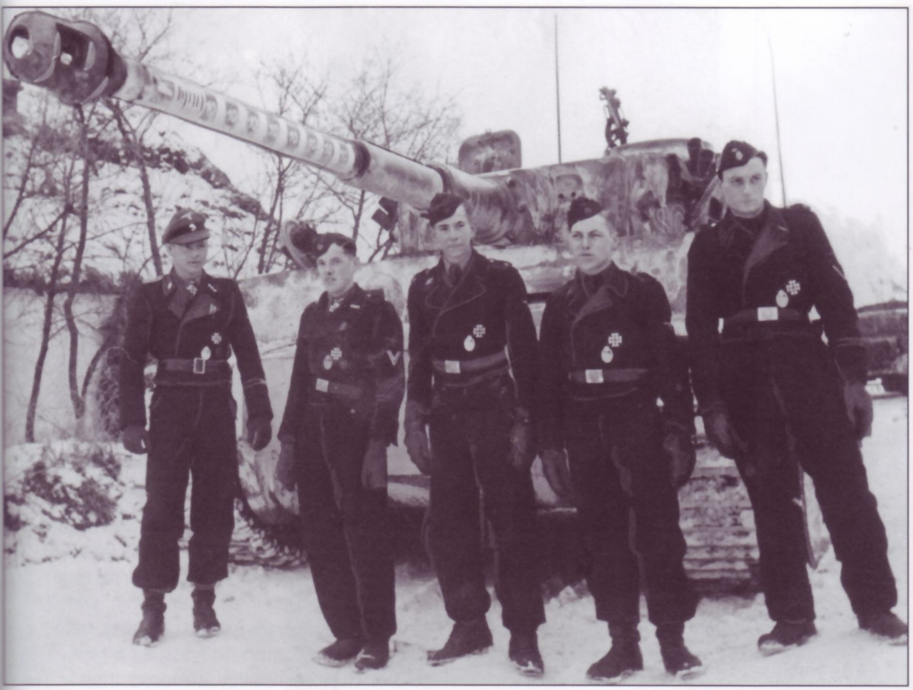
Enterprising soldiers have constructed a dwelling bunker (Wohnbunker) underneath this T-34/76 and probably use the tank hull itself for shelter gaining access through the belly escape hatch. It was a common practice to employ tank hulks for shelter, beneath, behind, or even inside. The danger was that they provided a readily identifiable landmark for an observer to direct fire on to.



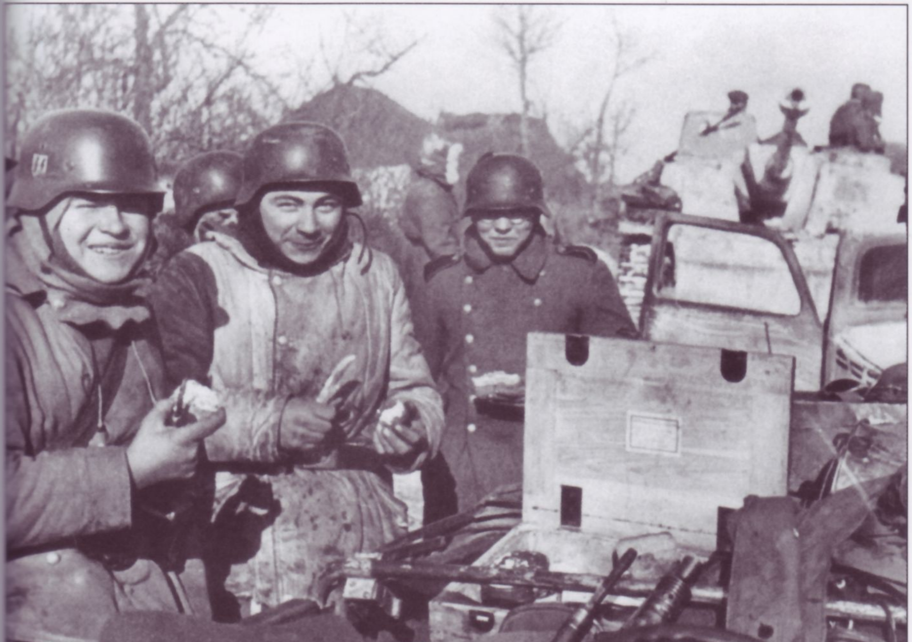
A winter suit-clad soldier negotiates his way passed a bellied out T-34/76. On his left sleeve is a colored cloth stripe in the color-of-the-day used as a means of friend-or-foe identification. The boxy containers on the tank's rear are extended-range auxiliary fuel tanks. These were normally jettisoned when the tank entered combat being used during long road marches. More commonly seen were smaller cylindrical auxiliary tanks.



Troops move forward passing over a small bridge. The retreating Russians had destroyed most bridges and it became a major task for German pioneer units to rapidly reconstruct the bridges. Often the Russians did the Germans a favor by destroying these small bridges. They were weakly constructed and unable to support the heavier loads the German brought with them, be it supply trucks or tanks. The pioneers replaced them with more robust bridges. The truck is a Krupp L2H43, one of the most widely used light trucks. Versions were also used to tow light antitank guns and flak pieces. A T-34/76 sits in the foreground.

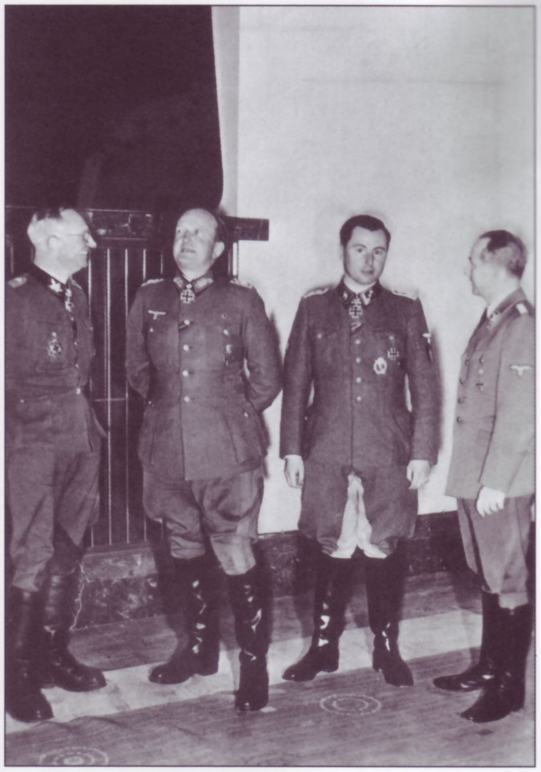


SS-Hauptsturmführer Michael Wittmann and his crew stand before their Tiger I after he and his gunner, SS-Rottenführer Balthasar "Boddy" Woll, were awarded the Knight's Cross for destroying 88 tanks and self-propelled guns up to 13 January 1944. The crew was assigned to SS-s.Pz.Abt.101. The remainder of the crew are, from left to right, SS-Panzerchütze Werner Irrgang, SS-Panzerschütze Sepp Rössner, and SS-Sturmmann Eugen Schmidt. All of the crew wear the Iron Cross 2nd Class and the Panzer Assault Badge on their breasts. The whitewashed Tiger Pz.Kpfw.VI Ausf.E in the background, while bearing 88 kill rings (Abschußringe), is not the tank the crew used in the actions, but one they later received.

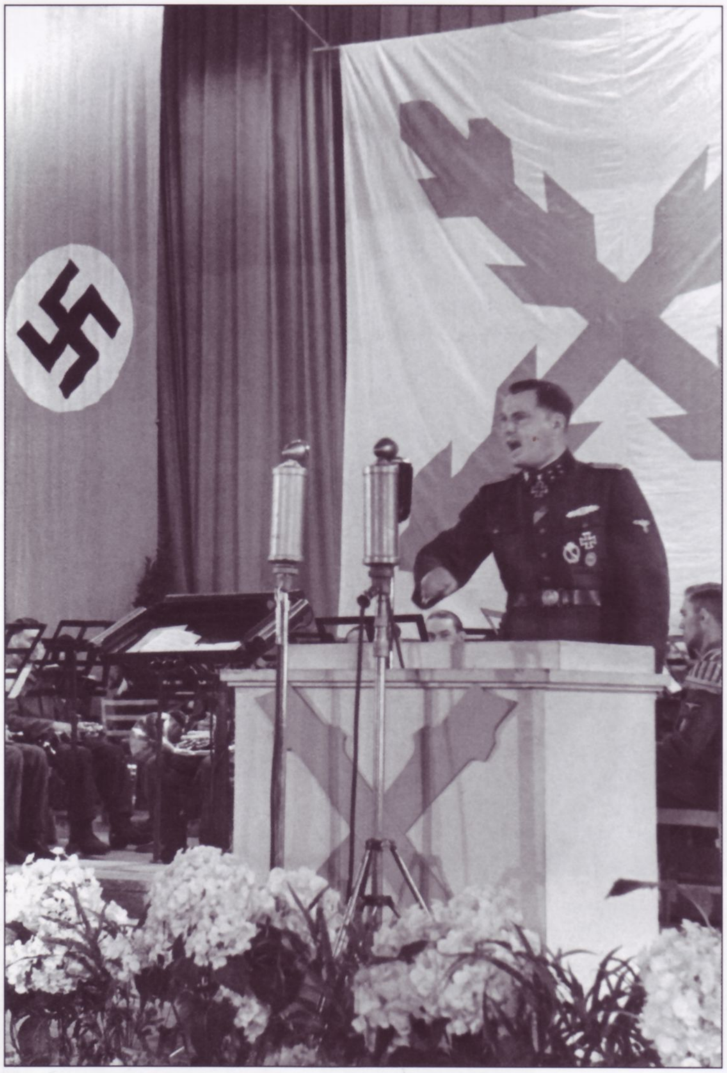


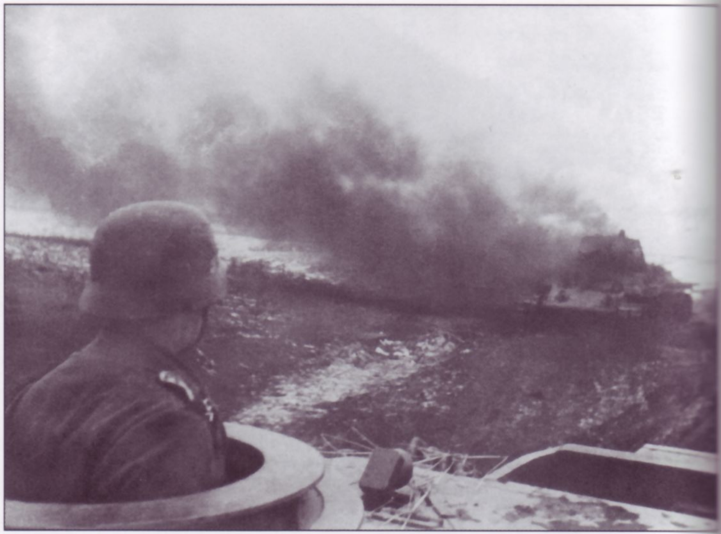
SS troops, wearing different winter garb, eat a cold meal, February 1944. The two men at left wear their insulated coats with one having the gray side out and the other the white side out. The man to the right wears the standard field gray greatcoat. In the background is a whitewashed StuG III Ausf.G assault gun.

SS-Sturmbannführer Léon Degrelle (left) and Generalleutnant Theobald Lieb conduct a propaganda tour after the Cherkassy battle. The battle was a joint effort wherein Waffen-SS and Army units broke through encircling Soviet lines to rescue other trapped Waffen-SS and Army units.



Heroes of the February 1944 Cherkassy battle pose for photographers. Left to right: SS-Gruppenführer Herbert Otto Gille (commanding IV.SS-Panzerkorps), Army Generalleutnant Theobald Lieb (commanding XXXXII.Armeekorps), and SS-Sturmbannführer Léon Degrelle (commanding SS-Sturmbrigade "Wallonien" comprised of French-speaking Belgium troops). The light colored in-seam of Degrelle's cavalry breeches are lined with soft tan leather. To their right is Dr. Dietrich, an SS propaganda specialist.

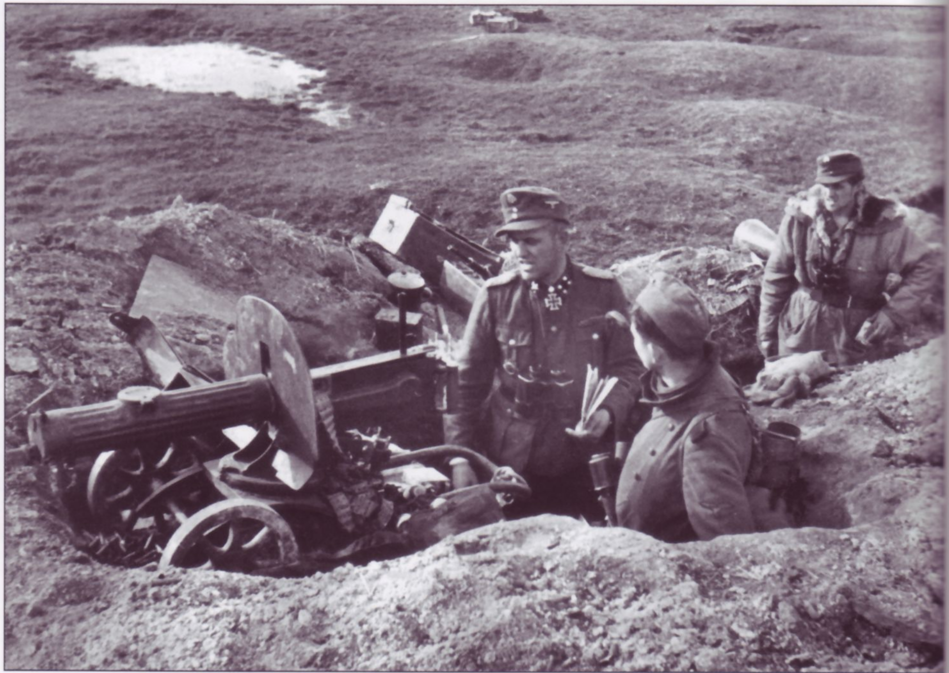




A Waffen-SS StuG III Ausf.G assault gun commander views his latest kill, a Soviet T-34, Ukraine, 1944. Tanks with a 360-degree rotating turret and high velocity guns normally had the advantage over assault guns, with their casemate-mounted limited-traverse gun. However, assault guns relied on ambush tactics to make their kills rather than maneuvering as a tank. They were also generally better armed and more heavily armored than a tank built on the same chassis, and were cheaper to produce.

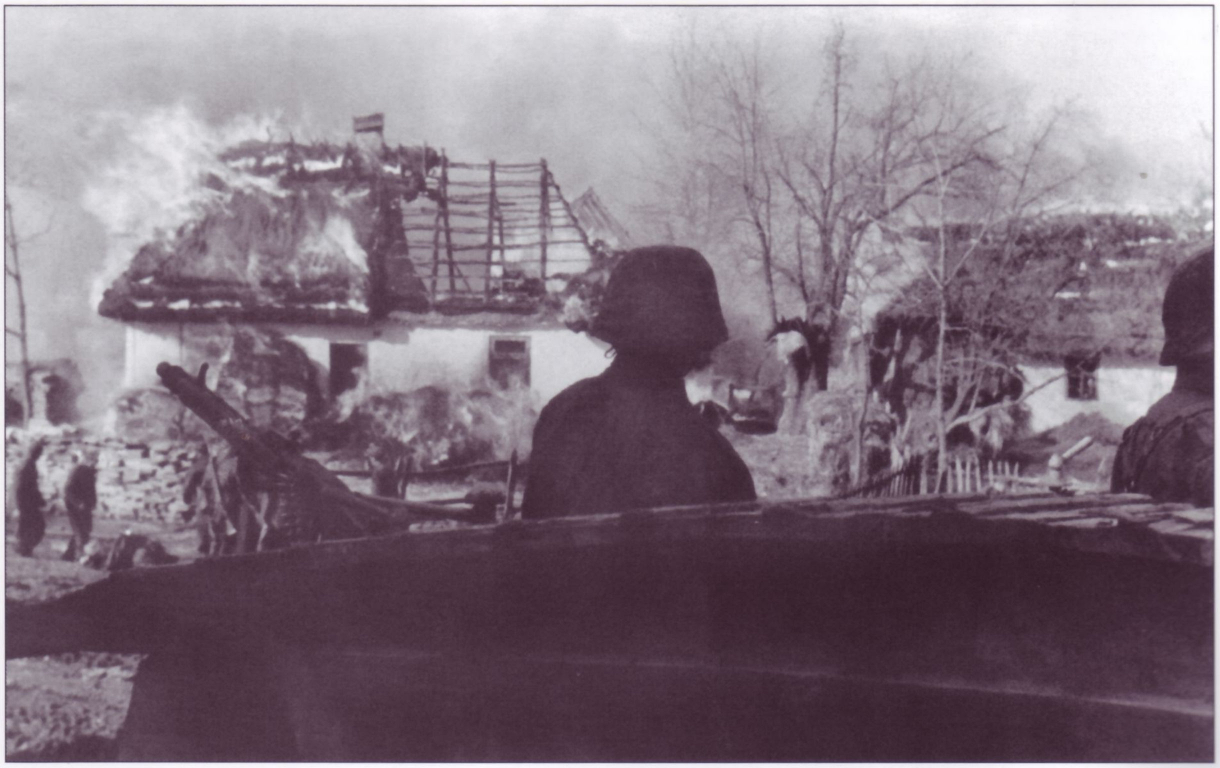
SS-Sturmbannführer Léon Degrelle speaks to a German audience after his return from the Cherkassy battle. He was decorated with the Knight's Cross for his battle achievements. SS-Sturmbrigade "Wallonien" was attached to SS-Panzergrenadier-Division "Wiking" at the time of the battle. The green-on-white Wallonien banner serves as a backdrop and adorns the podium.

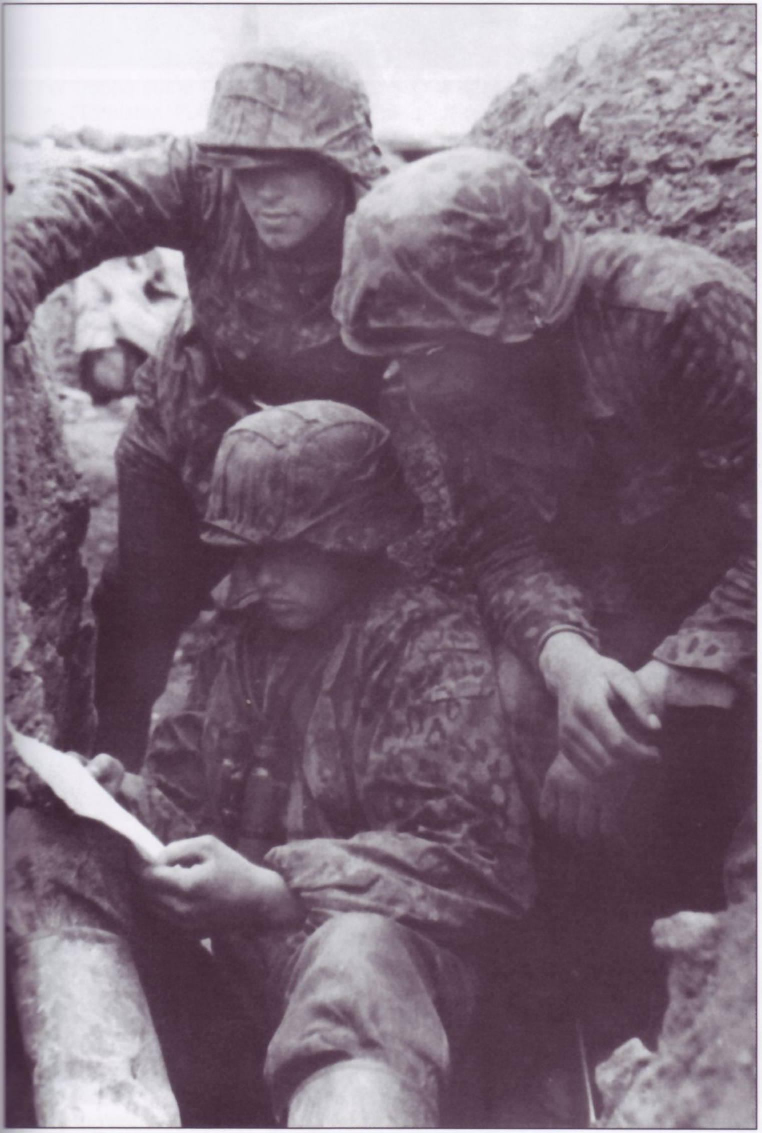
Another hero of the Cherkassy battle was SS-Hauptsturmführer Hans Dorr, here wearing a Knight's Cross previously awarded for the autumn 1942 battles in the Caucasus. He took part in this battle as commander of I.Abteilung, SS-Panzer-Regiment 5, of the 5.SS-Panzergrenadier-Division "Wiking".



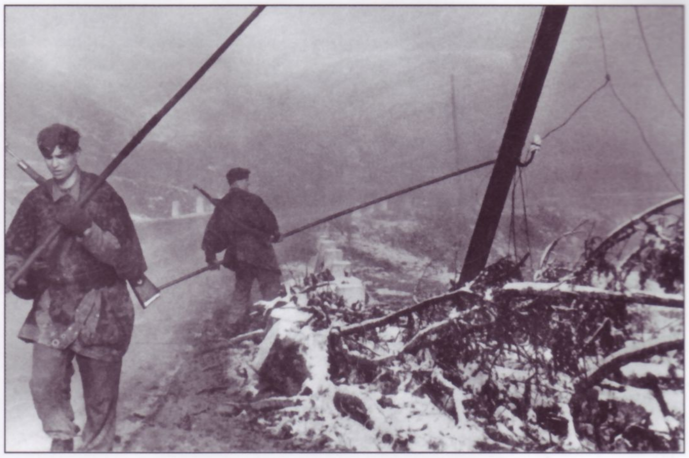
Here SS-Hauptsturmführer Dorr inspects a machine-gun position of his SS-Panzergrenadier-Regiment 9 "Germania" in the Kovel sector, spring 1944. The weapon is a captured Soviet 7.62mm SPM-1910 Maxim heavy machine-gun, which the Germans referred to as an s.MG216(r). This version has a large filler cap on the top of the barrel jacket to allow it to be quickly filled with water. It was common for units to use captured automatic weapons to increase their firepower.

Waffen-SS troops enter a Ukrainian village in the spring of 1944, during a German counterattack. In the foreground is a mittlerer Pionierpanzerwagen Sd.Kfz.251/7 Ausf.D equipped with a pair of 4-meter "Übergangsschiene" (portable bridge) sections on side racks. Note the MG42 on the anti-aircraft mount at the rear of the vehicle.

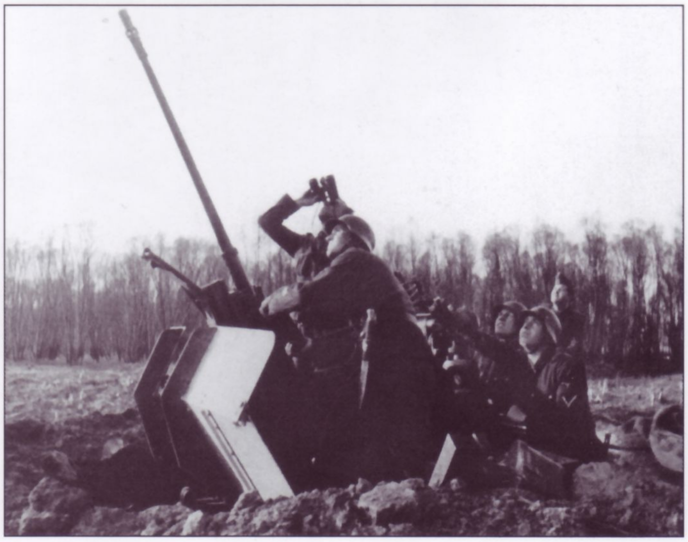




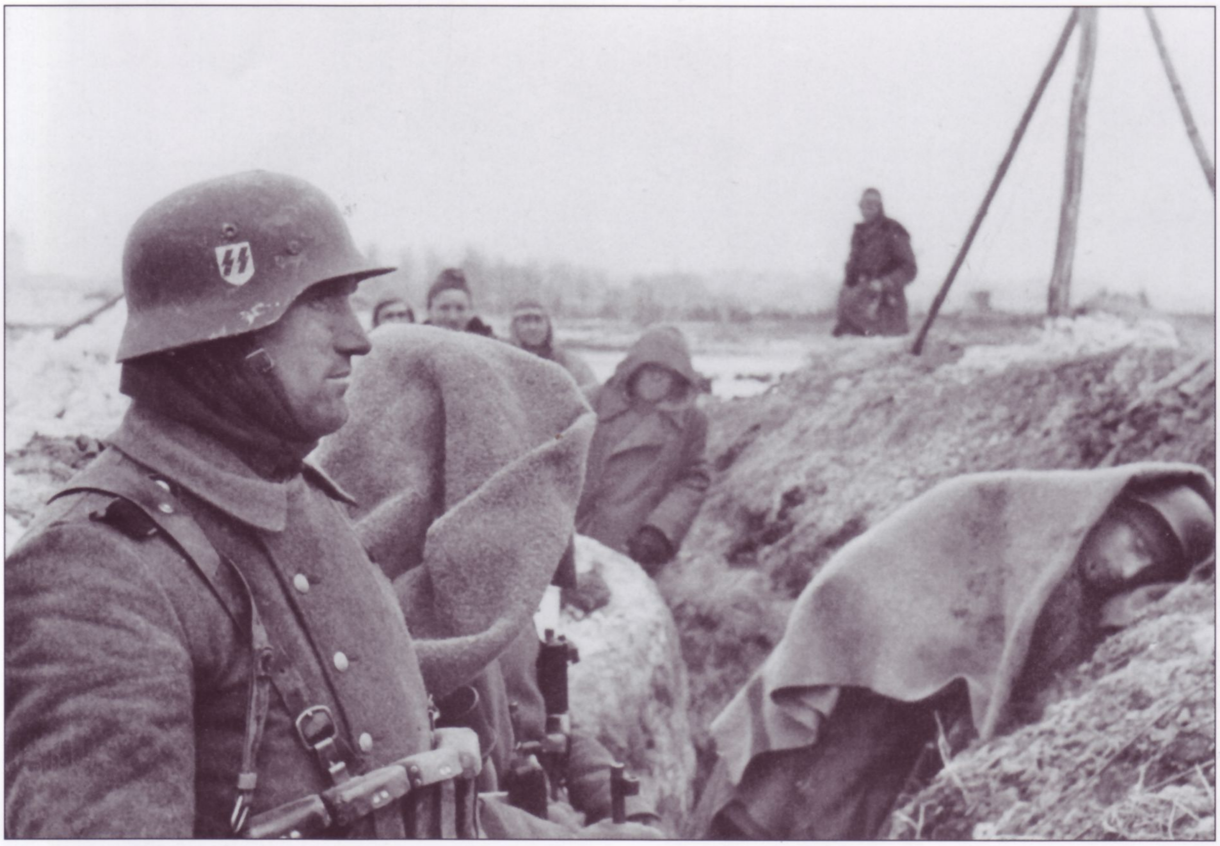
A Waffen-SS soldier shares a letter from home with his comrades, spring 1944. They wear camouflage uniforms and insulated winter boots.



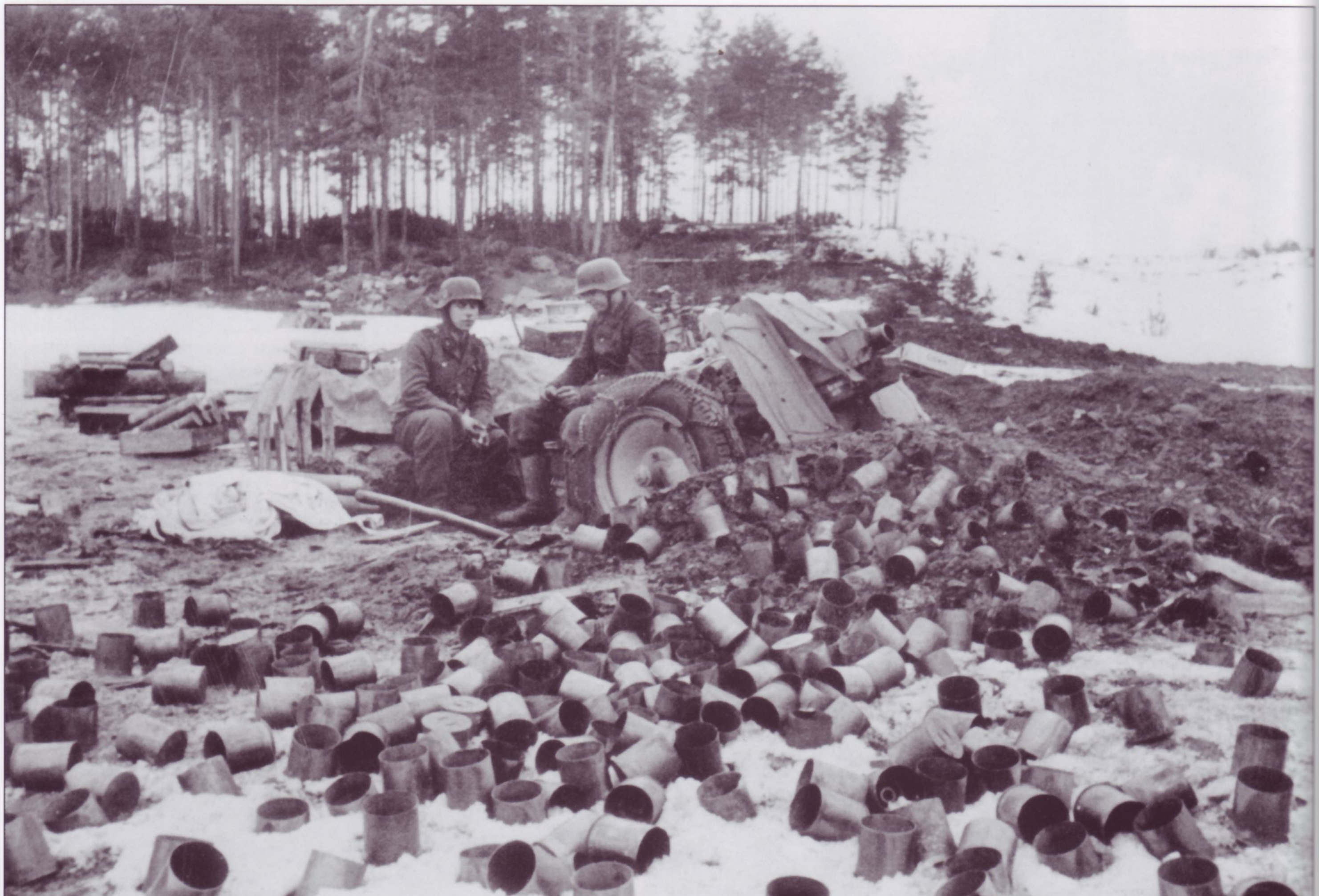
Signal troops using lineman's poles clear damaged telephone lines in southeast Europe, spring 1944. The man in the foreground wears a Zeltbahn shelter-quarter folded as a jacket, one of several ways to wear this multi-purpose garment.



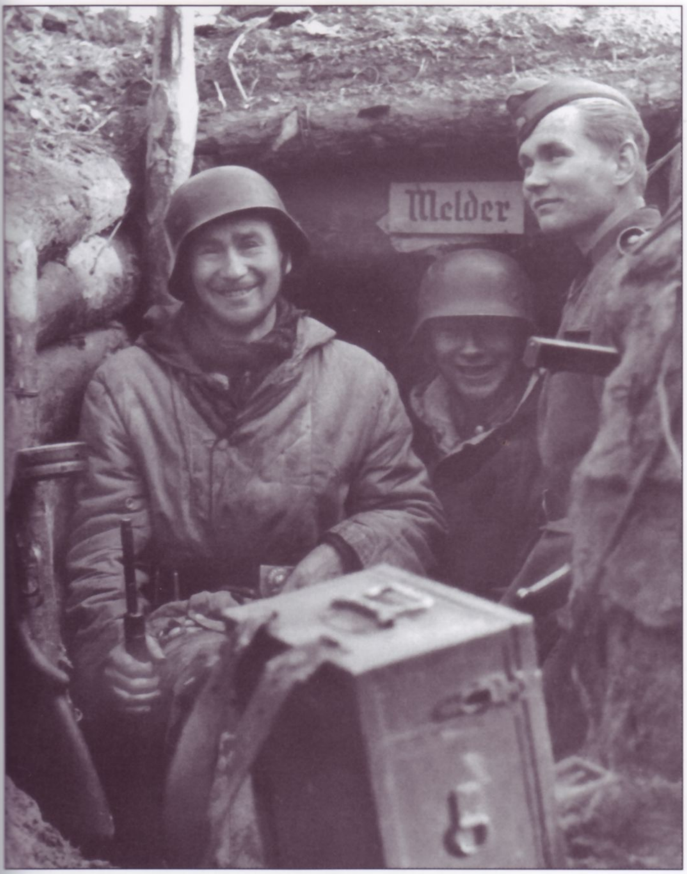
The crew of a 2cm FlaK30 anti-aircraft gun undergoes training in Hungary, spring 1944. It is possible that they are Hungarians from 25.Waffen-Grenadier-Division der SS "Hunyadi" (ungarische Nr.1).



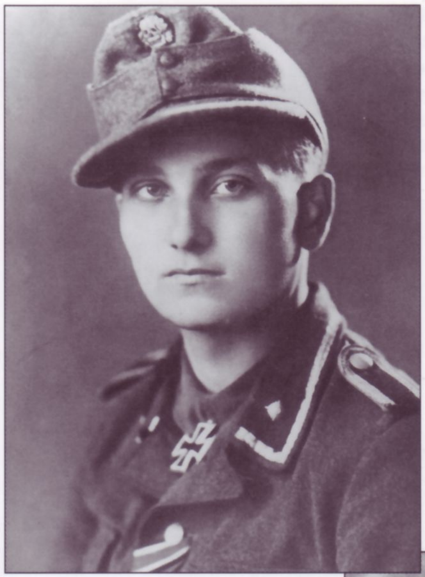
Combat-exhausted Waffen-SS troops at Narva, on the Estonian border with the USSR, attempt to rest in the frozen trenches, March/April 1944. The man in the foreground wears a wool-knit toque beneath his helmet to protect the back of his head and neck and to prevent the tops of his ears from freezing to his helmet. The largely Estonian-manned 20. Waffen-Grenadier-Division der SS (estnische Nr.1) defended the Narva area on the Baltic coast.



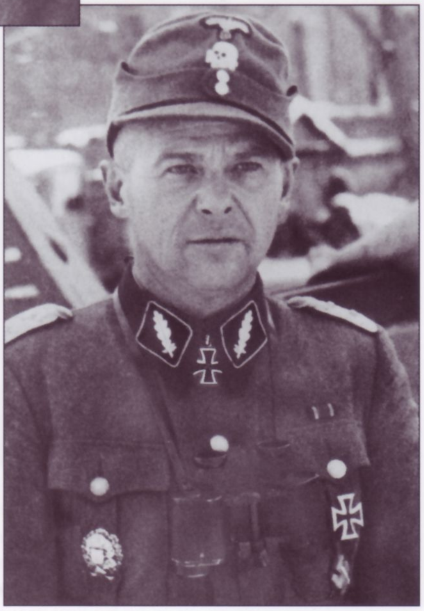
The crew of this 7.5cm l.IG18 light infantry gun have obviously been busy supporting its parent unit in the Narva area in April of 1944. Two such guns were usually attached to each battalion of an infantry regiment for direct and indirect fire support. Ice chains are secured to the tires for better traction in slippery conditions, while the wire on the shield is for attaching foliage.



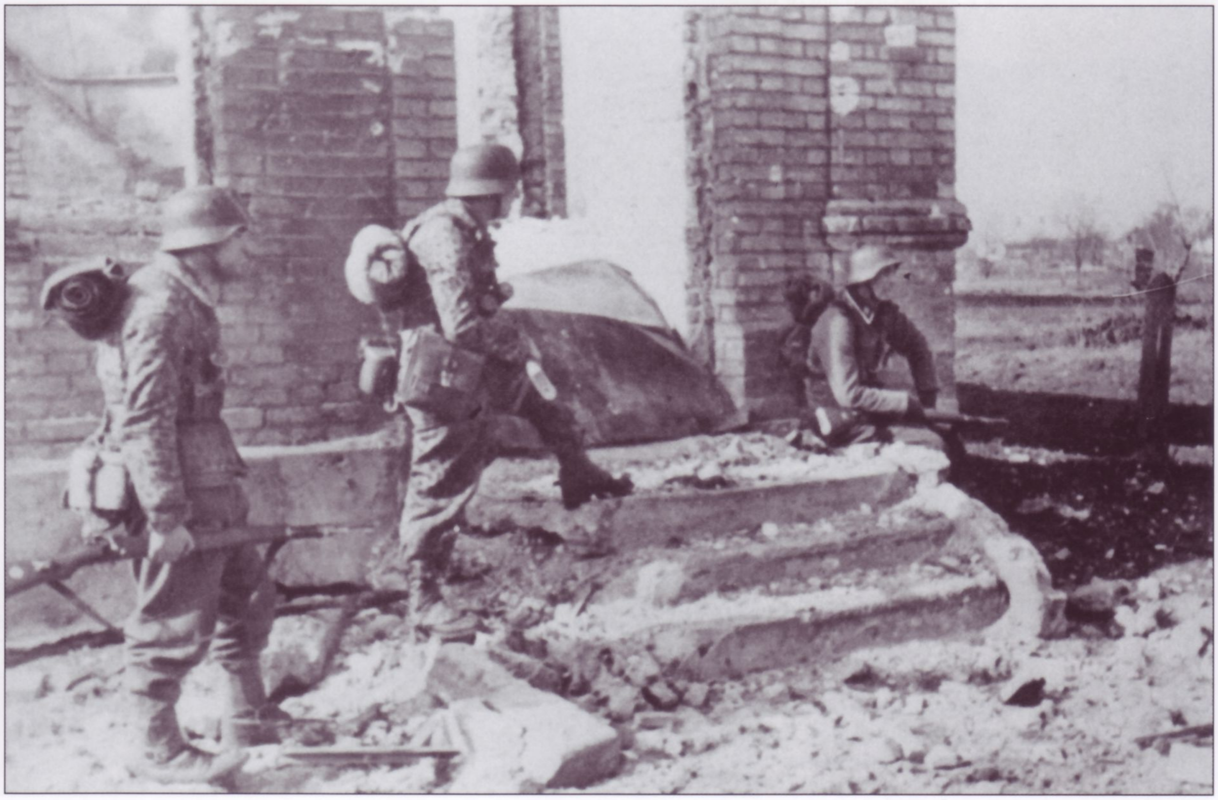
Signal troops stand before their bunker with a back-pack, or "canister" radio (Tornister Funk) in the foreground, Narva, 1944. The sign, "Melder", identifies the bunker as a message center. A Soviet 7.62mm PPSh-41 sub-machine-gun, designated the MP717(r) by the Germans, leans against the trench to the left. It is often assumed these were considered to be superior to the German MP40, as they were so often seen in the hands of German troops. Units comprised of Russian volunteers were often armed with Soviet weapons as they were already trained in their use. Other German units used the PPSh-41 as a simple means to augment their firepower. While a rugged and reliable weapon, it reportedly had poor penetration and knock-down power.



SS-Unterscharführer Herald Nugiseks was assigned to the 20.Waffen-Grenadier-Division der SS, which fought in Baltic states against the 1944 Soviet onslaught. Nugiseks won the Knight's Cross for his personal bravery during the attack against the Soviet bridgehead at Vopskula. He personally led three attacks, which finally broke through enemy resistance, thus aiding in the elimination of the bridgehead.

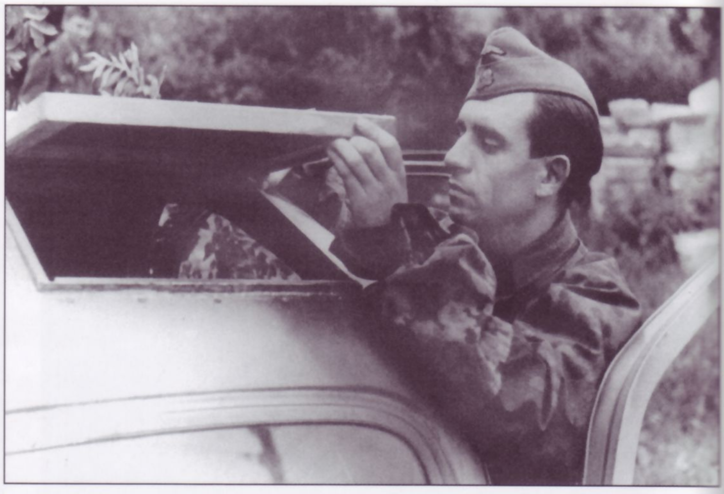


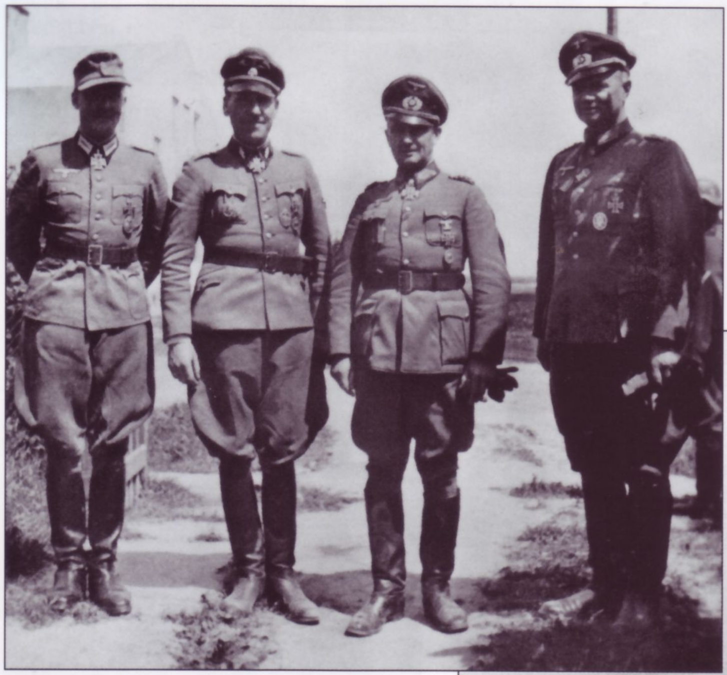
SS-Standartenführer Voldemars Veiss was a Baltic German, who after previous military and diplomatic service, served in the 2.Lettische SS-Freiwilligen-Brigade, which was composed of Latvian "Schuma" (police) battalions. He was the first Latvian to win a Knight's Cross. The Brigade was later expanded into 19.Waffen-Grenadier-Division der SS (lettische Nr.2).



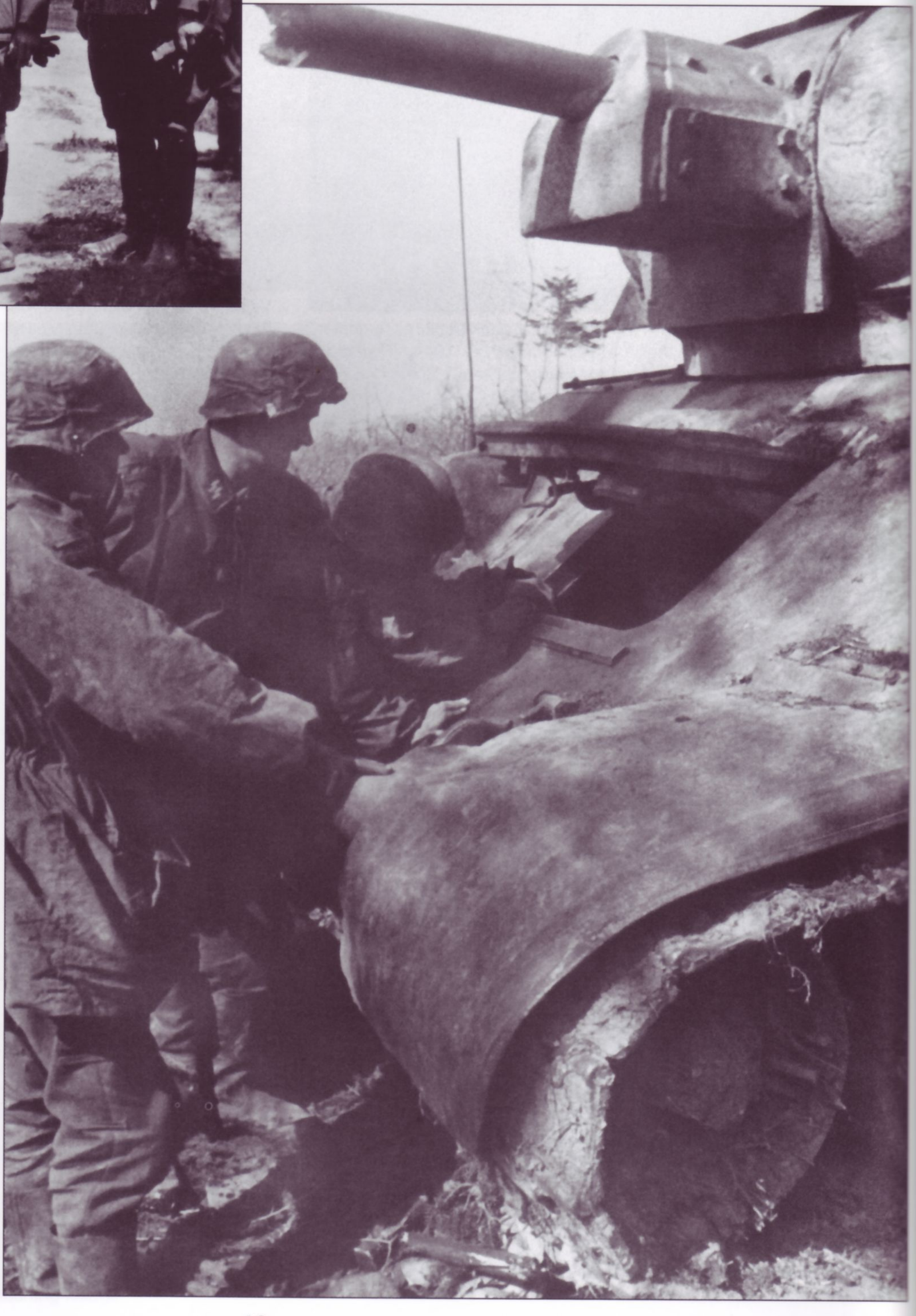
Lightly-equipped Waffen-SS assault troops, probably of SS-Panzer-Division "Wiking" during the battle for Kovel wearing a mix of uniforms, May 1944. Their helmets are bare of insignia. The black-white-red swastika shield decal on the left side of the helmet was ordered removed in March 1940 and the black-on-white SS runes decal on the right side in November 1943. It was common for them to be left in place, however.

A Waffen-SS driver opens the roof ventilator of a staff car indicating the hot summer has arrived. The design of the camouflage smock's sleeve is interesting in that the cuff portion with its elastic closure is sewn on as a separate component, to allow it to be easily replaced if damaged.

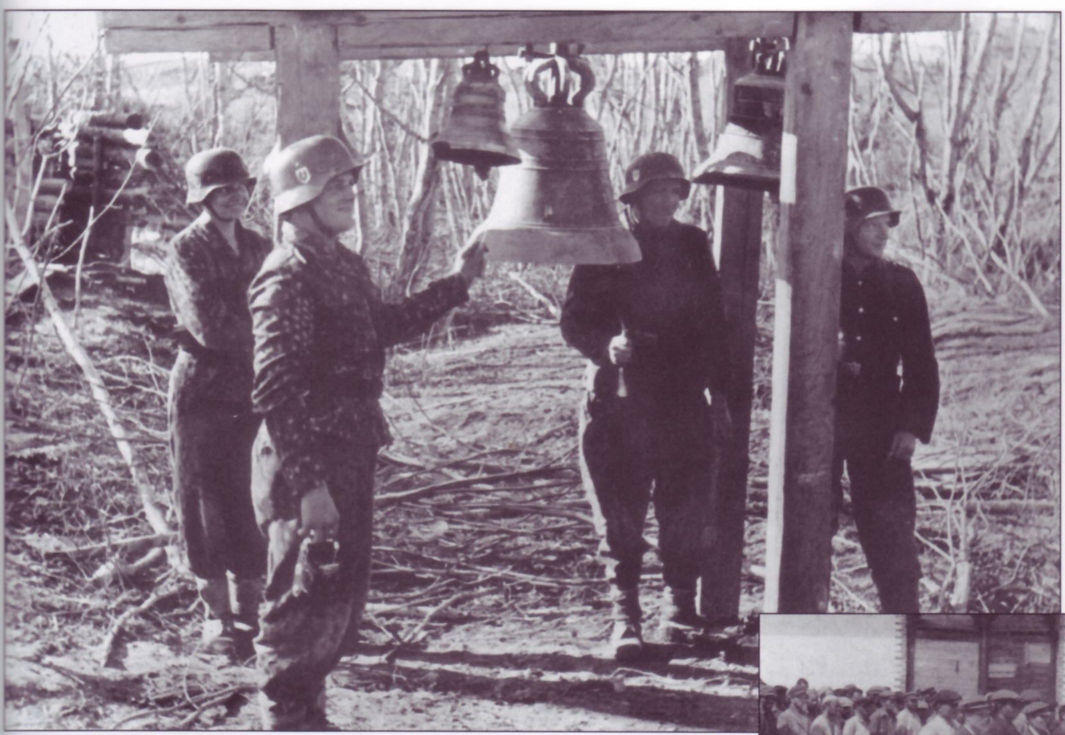




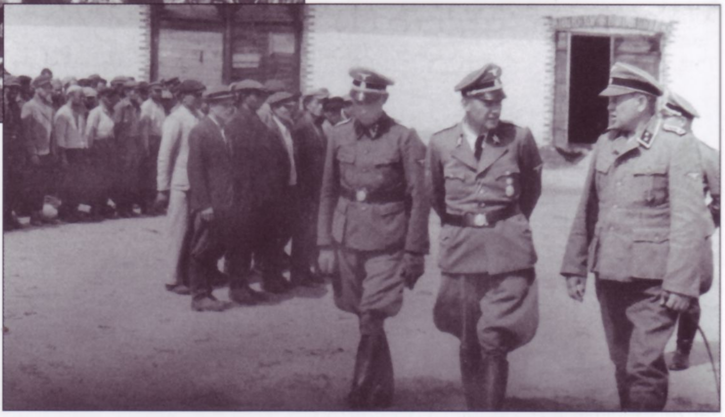
Army and Waffen-SS officers, all Knight's Cross winners, are pictured after the relief of Kovel, May 1944. The second from the left is SS-Standartenführer Johannes Rudolf Mühlenkamp, commander of SS-Panzer-Regiment 5 of the 5.SS-Panzer-Division "Wiking."



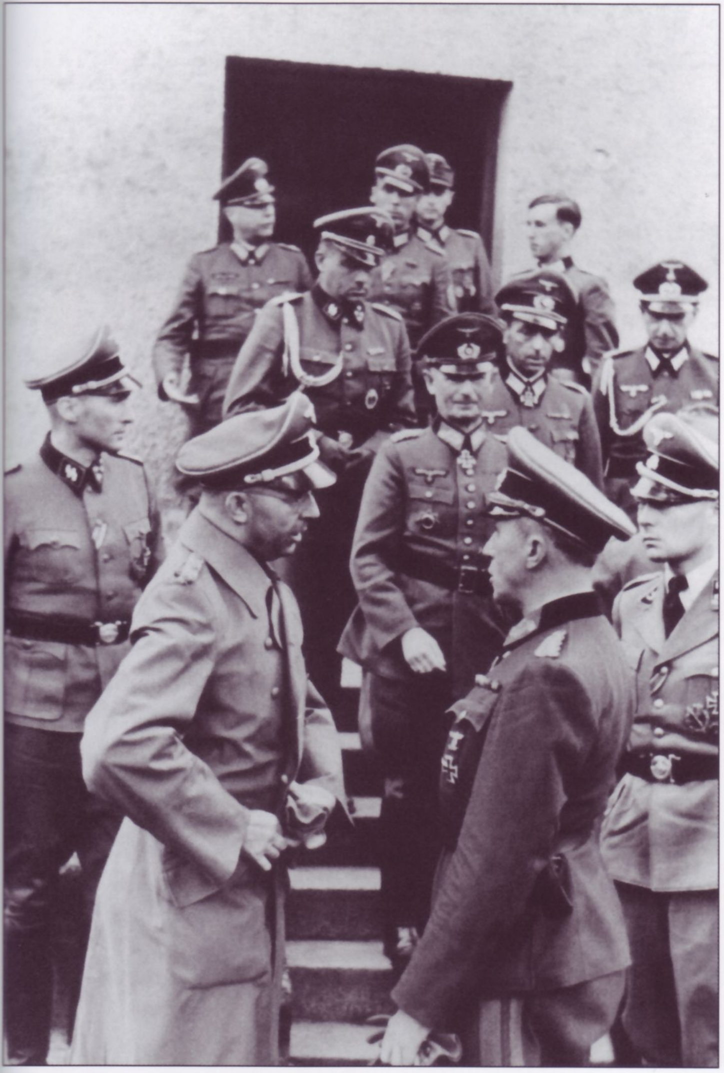
Waffen-SS troops of II.SS-Panzerkorps inspect a gutted T-34/76 tank in the Tarnopol area, May 1944. They wear the "oak leaf" pattern camouflage uniform and helmet cover.



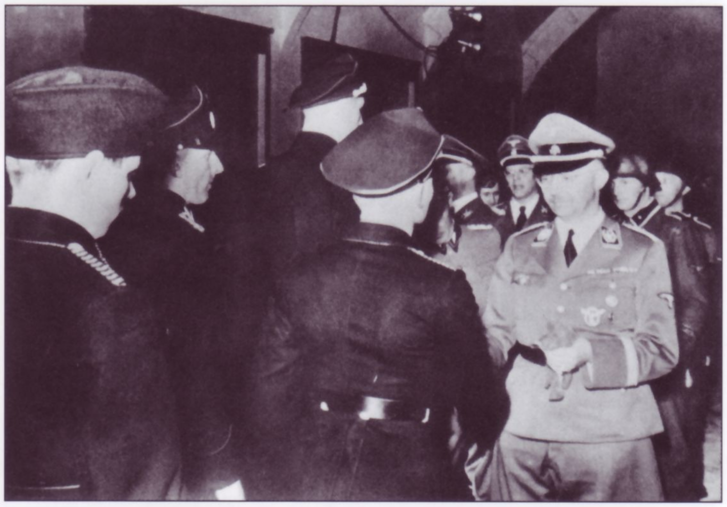
Youthful Waffen-SS soldiers ring a bell, taken from a church, to sound assembly, Narva, summer 1944. The bells also may have been used to signal an air attack, announce meals, etc. Note that they wear uniforms of mismatched components.



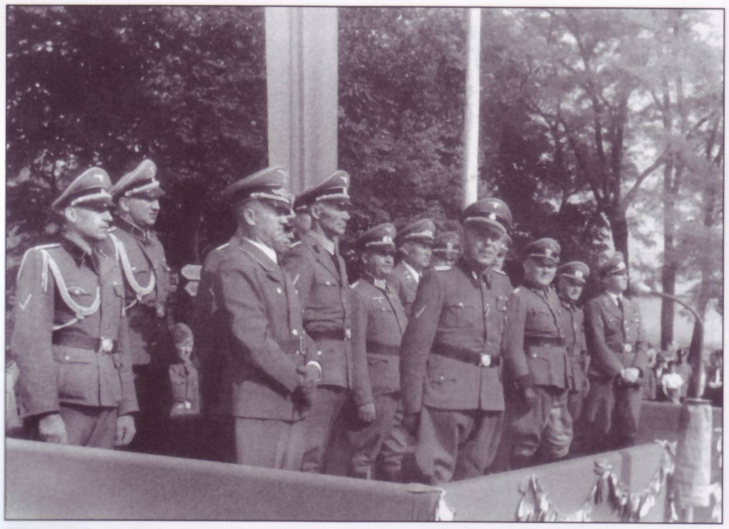
SS-Hauptsturmführer Gehalke and SS-Brigadeführer Odilo Globocnik inspect Russian and Baltic State volunteers for the Waffen-SS at the Trawnicki training camp in Poland, summer 1944. This was also the site of a concentration camp. Most non-Aryan Waffen-SS volunteers conducted security and anti-partisan duties and were not numbered among the more "elite" first-line divisions. Others were trained as concentration camp guards. Note that the Oberscharführer to the right carries a whip, which gives a hint as to how disciplinary standards were maintained.



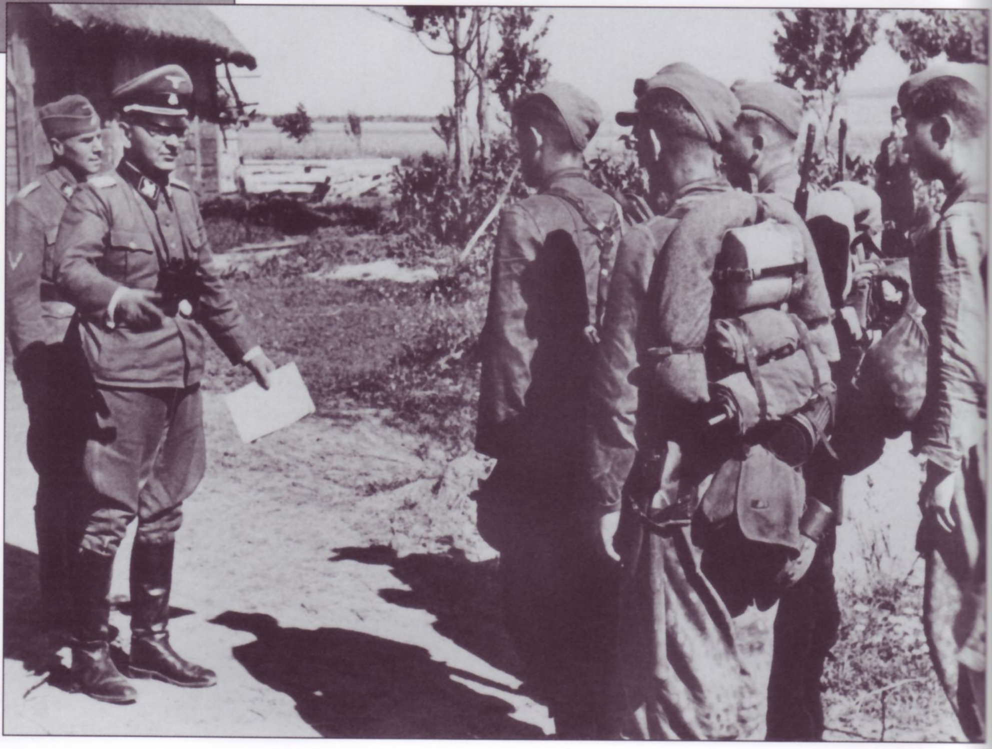
Heinrich Himmler and his staff are pictured here after the adjourning of a meeting with Army officers, July 1944. This meeting took place after the assassination attempt on Hitler, when Himmler was made Chef der Heeresrüstung und Befehlshaber des Ersatzheeres (Chief of Army Equipment and Commander of the Replacement Army) in order to assert a more "positive" control over the Army.



Reichsführer-SS Heinrich Himmler greeting black-uniformed officials of the Netherlands Nationaal-Socialistische Beweging, or Dutch Nazi Party. The NSB was extremely effective in convincing Dutchmen to volunteer for Waffen-SS service where they served in SS-Division "Wiking". Arthur Seyss-Inquart (wearing glasses), the Reich Commissioner of the Netherlands, can be seen over Himmler's right shoulder. An Austrian, Seyss-Inquart (whose name was derisively converted to "Six-and-a-Quarter, which was its literal translation into the Dutch language) was held responsible for the deportation of 132,000 Dutch Jews and was executed after the war.

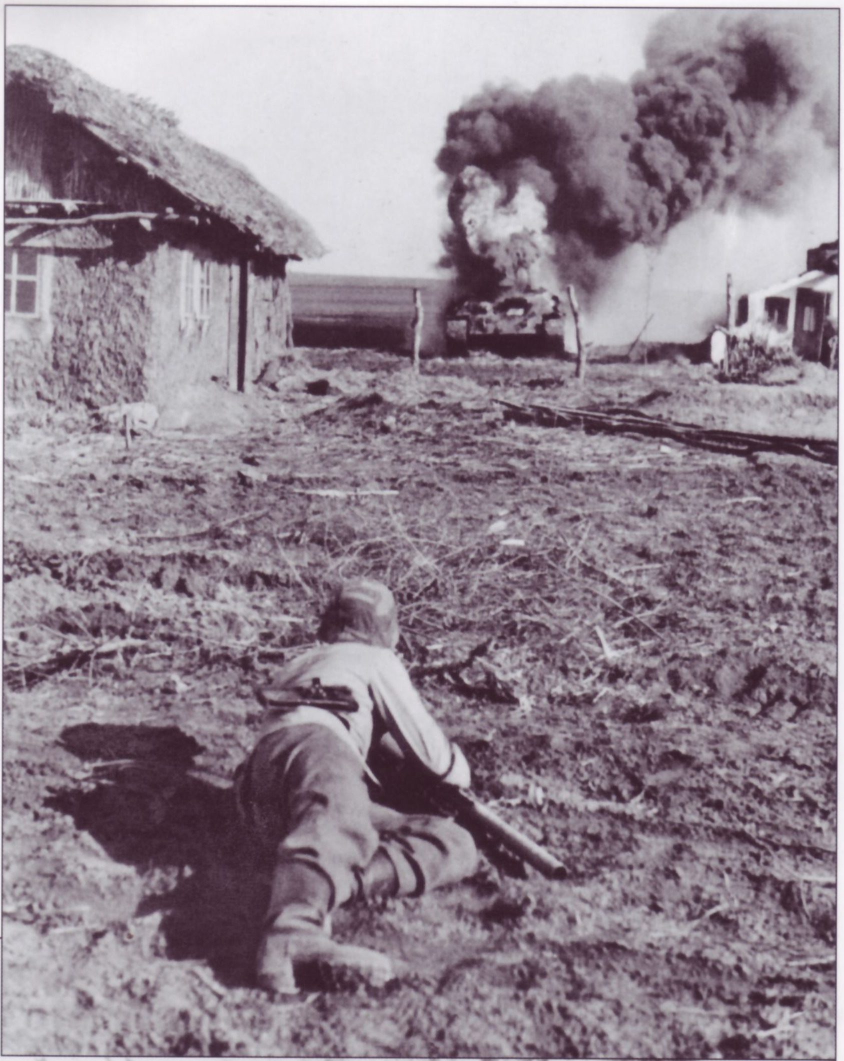


This series of photographs is of unidentified Waffen-SS officers welcoming Dutch volunteers into the ranks of SS-Division "Wiking", mainly in the Division's SS-Panzergrenadier-Regiment 10 "Westland." Other Dutch citizens would later serve in 34.SS-Freiwilligen-Grenadier-Division "Landstorm Nederland". The center-stage Standartenführer wears a Totenkopf cuff title.

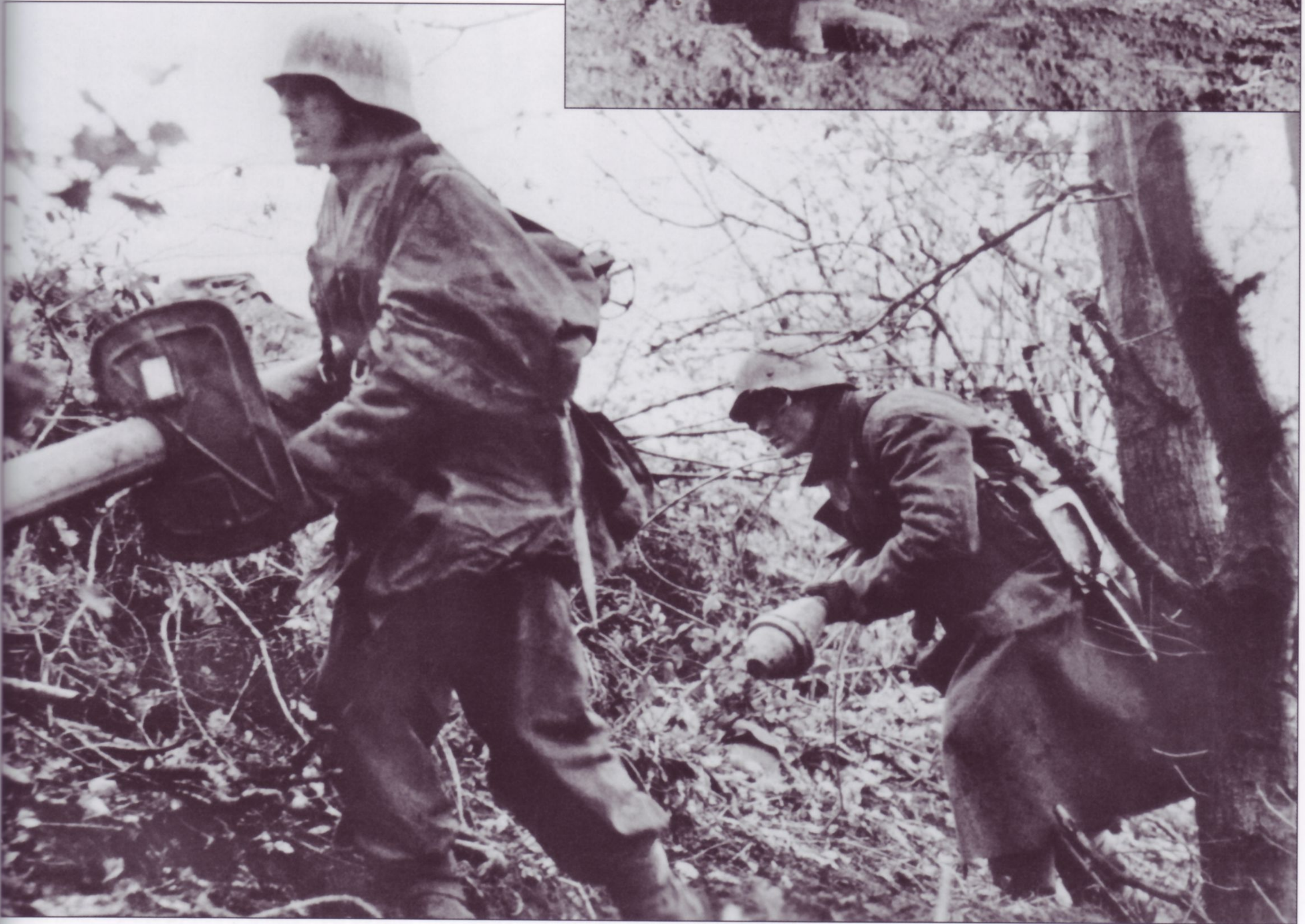


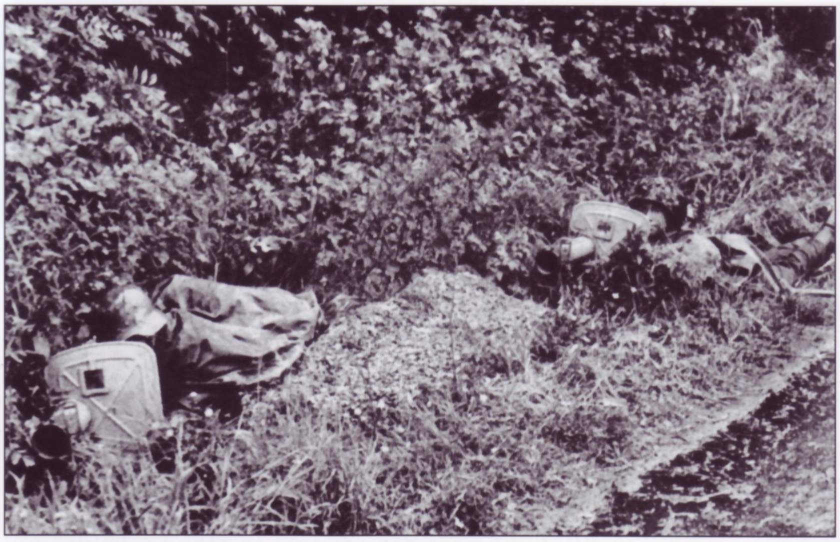
German officers and NCOs trained the new late-war foreign volunteer SS divisions and also provided much of the leadership cadre. Here an SS-Brigadeführer addresses Ukrainian troops of 14.Waffen-Grenadier-Division der SS (ukrainische Nr.1). They carry typical combat equipment.

A Panzerfaust-armed soldier watches his target burn, a T-34. The introduction of the Panzerfaust, what the German soldier simply called a Faust (Fist), for the first time provided infantrymen with a lightweight, relatively compact, easy to operate, antitank weapon capable of destroying most tanks, albeit at close range. The Panzerfaust was a single-shot, disposable weapon projecting a shaped-charge warhead.

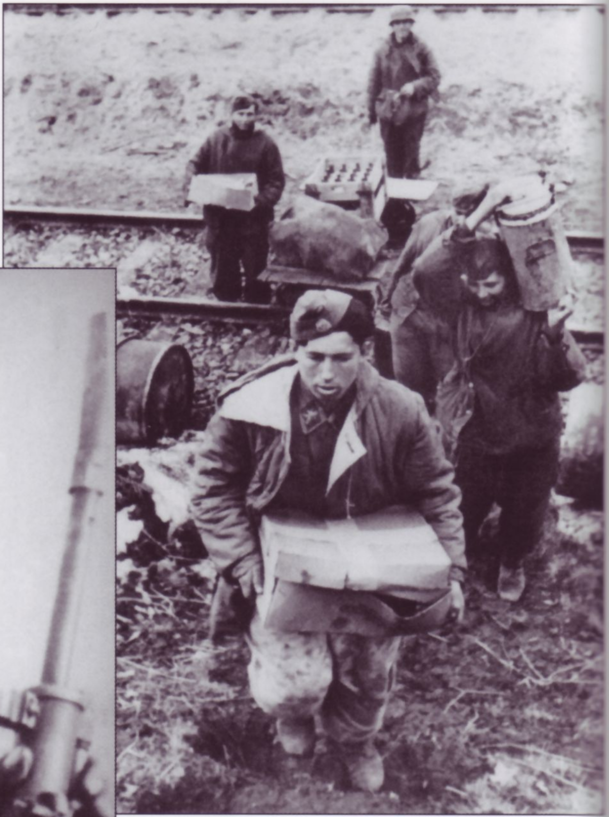


Two new tank-killers were introduced in 1943 and proved to be extremely effective. To the right is the bazooka-like 8.8cm RPzB43 Raketenpanzerbüchse (rocket [anti]armor weapon) popularly known as the Panzerschreck (armor terror) or Ofenrohr (stovepipe) to the German soldiers. It had an effective range of about 150 meters or so. The more compact Panzerfaust 30 to the right had a 30-meter range.The Panzerschreck gunner wears a shelter-quarter (Zeltbahn) as a rain "jacket."

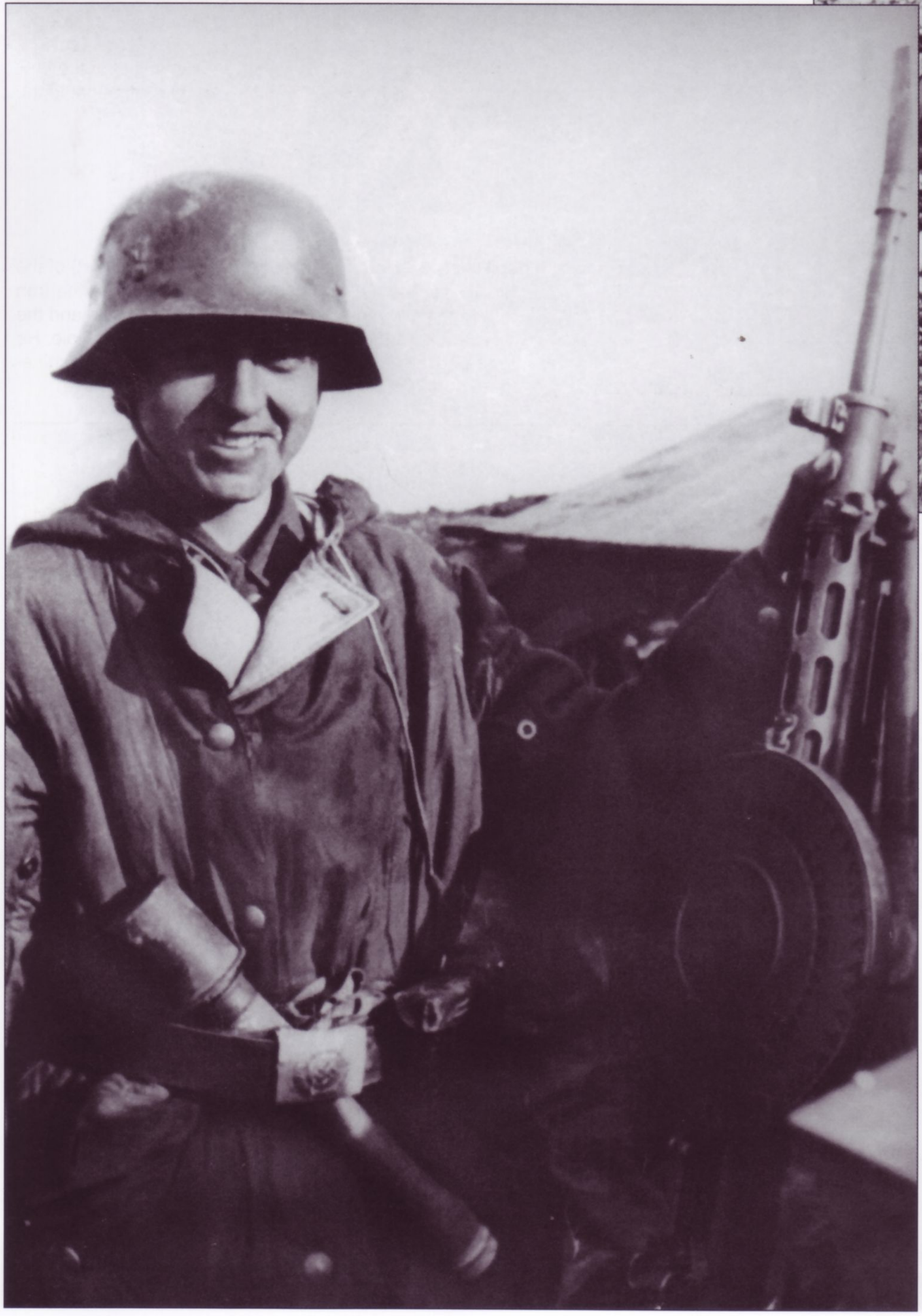




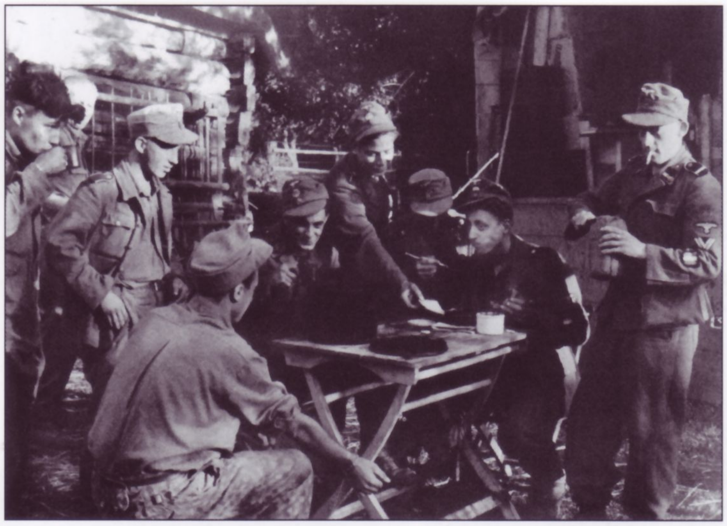
Two Panzerschreck gunners lie concealed beside a road. As here the Panzerschreck and Panzerfaust were often used as mobile weapons with the gunners utilizing any suitable natural cover as a firing position. The blast shields were often removed to reduce the weight and make the weapon less awkward. Whether dug in or mobile, Panzerschreck gunners often operated in threes or at least pairs. If three were employed two would be forward and one further to the rear as back-up and to protect the flanks. The gunner had to be careful when firing from the prone position as here ensuring his legs would not be caught in the significant rearward flash and blast.



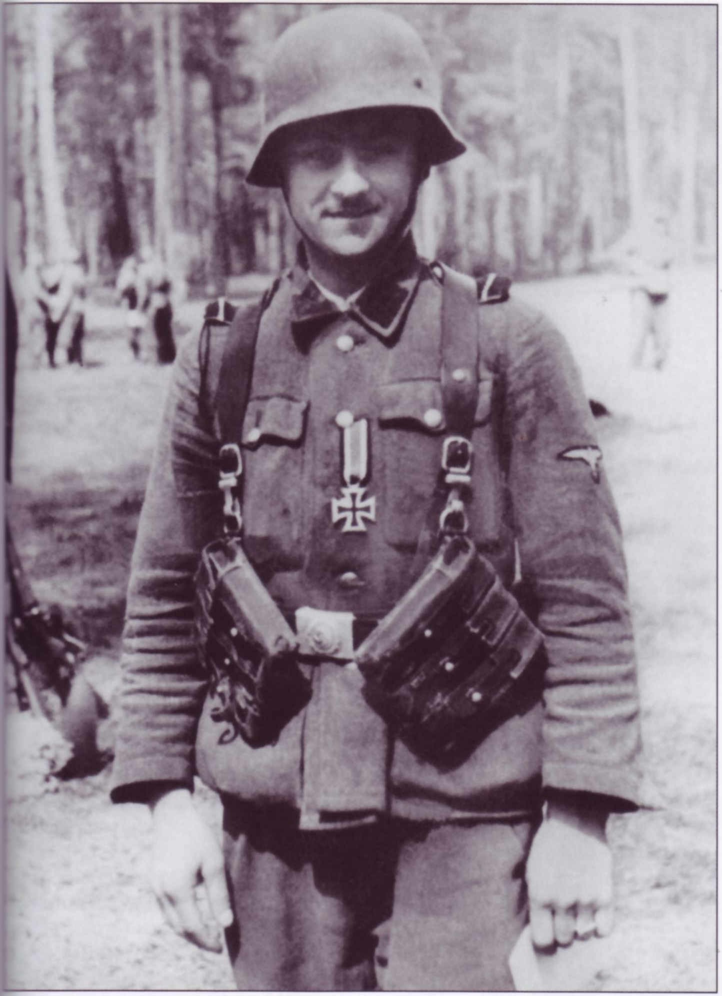
Members of the 14.Waffen-Grenadier-Division der SS draw their rations from a railroad siding. The second man from the front carries an insulated food container probably filled with soup or stew. Although it cannot be seen, a silver "rampant lion" insignia was worn on the right collar by members of this division.



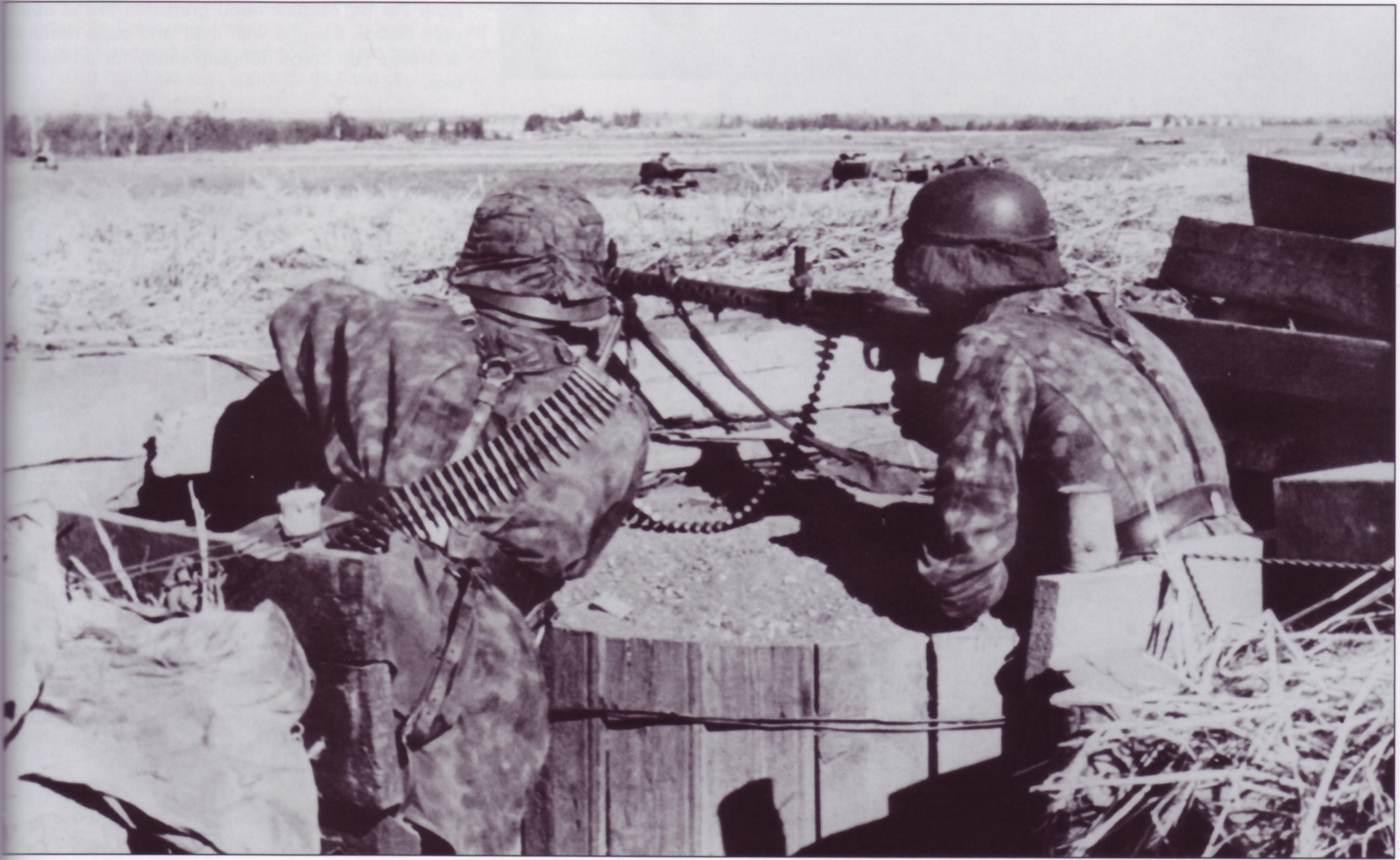
A machine-gunner of 14.Waffen-Grenadier-Division der SS armed with a Stg.24 stick hand grenade and a Soviet 7.62mm Degtaryev DP light machine-gun, called by the Germans the le.MG120(r). The drum magazine held 47 rounds. Rugged and reliable, it was used extensively by Waffen-SS and Army "Osttruppen" (Eastern Troops) units.



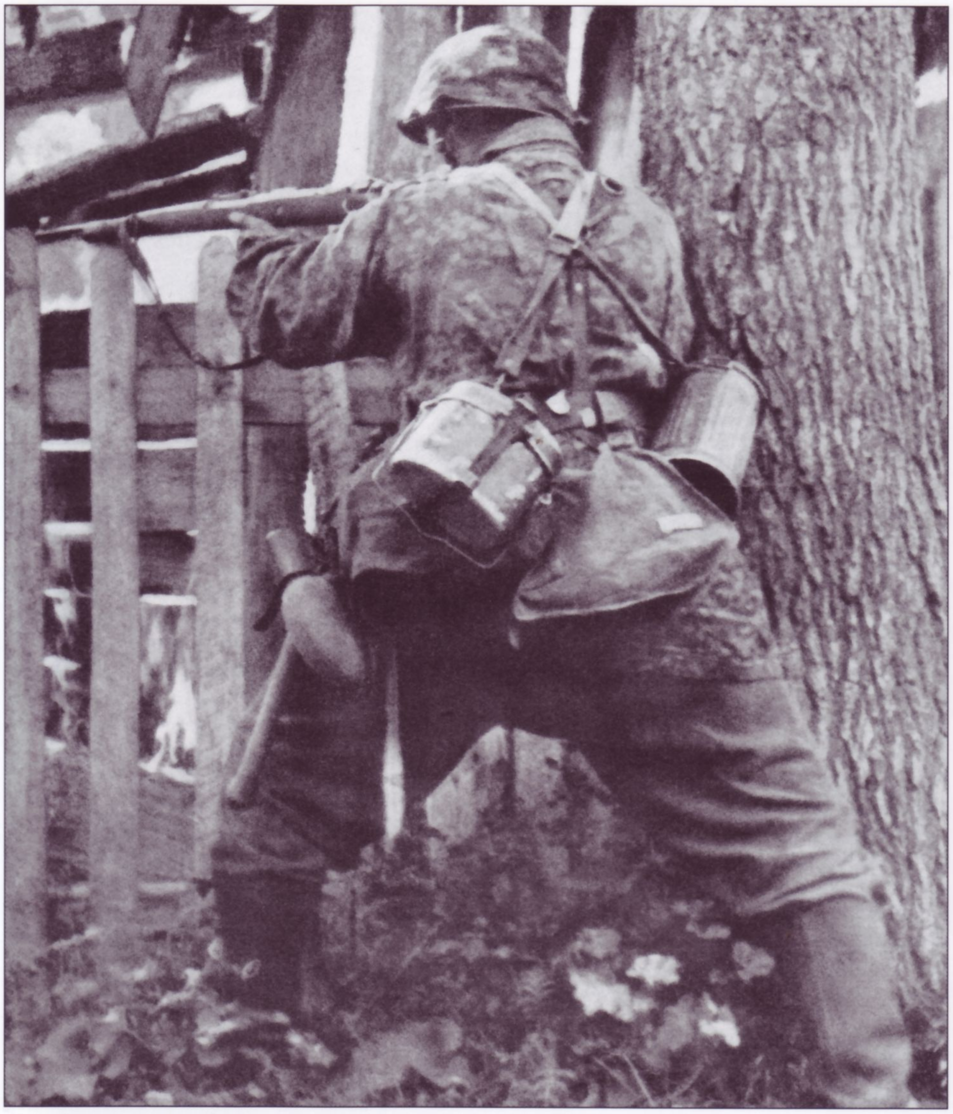
Members of the French-manned 33.Waffen-Grenadier-Division der SS "Charlemagne" (französische Nr.1) dine during training. The division was organized from formerly German Army units, specifically: Infanterie-Regiment 638 (französische) and the Legion des Voluntaires Francaise. The SS-Rottenführer to the right wears the blue-white-red arm shield of the LVF. Later, re-organized as SS-Grenadier-Brigade "Charlemagne," it fought to the end in Berlin.



This photograph depicts an SS-Unterführer Bewerber (NCO aspirant) of the 14.Waffen-Grenadier-Division der SS, who has just been awarded the Iron Cross 2nd Class. Later he would remove the Cross from the ribbon and the ribbon would be displayed worn through the tunic's second button hole. He appears to wear three-pocket magazine pouches for the MP40 machine-pistol, but they seem to be too short to hold the 32-round magazines.

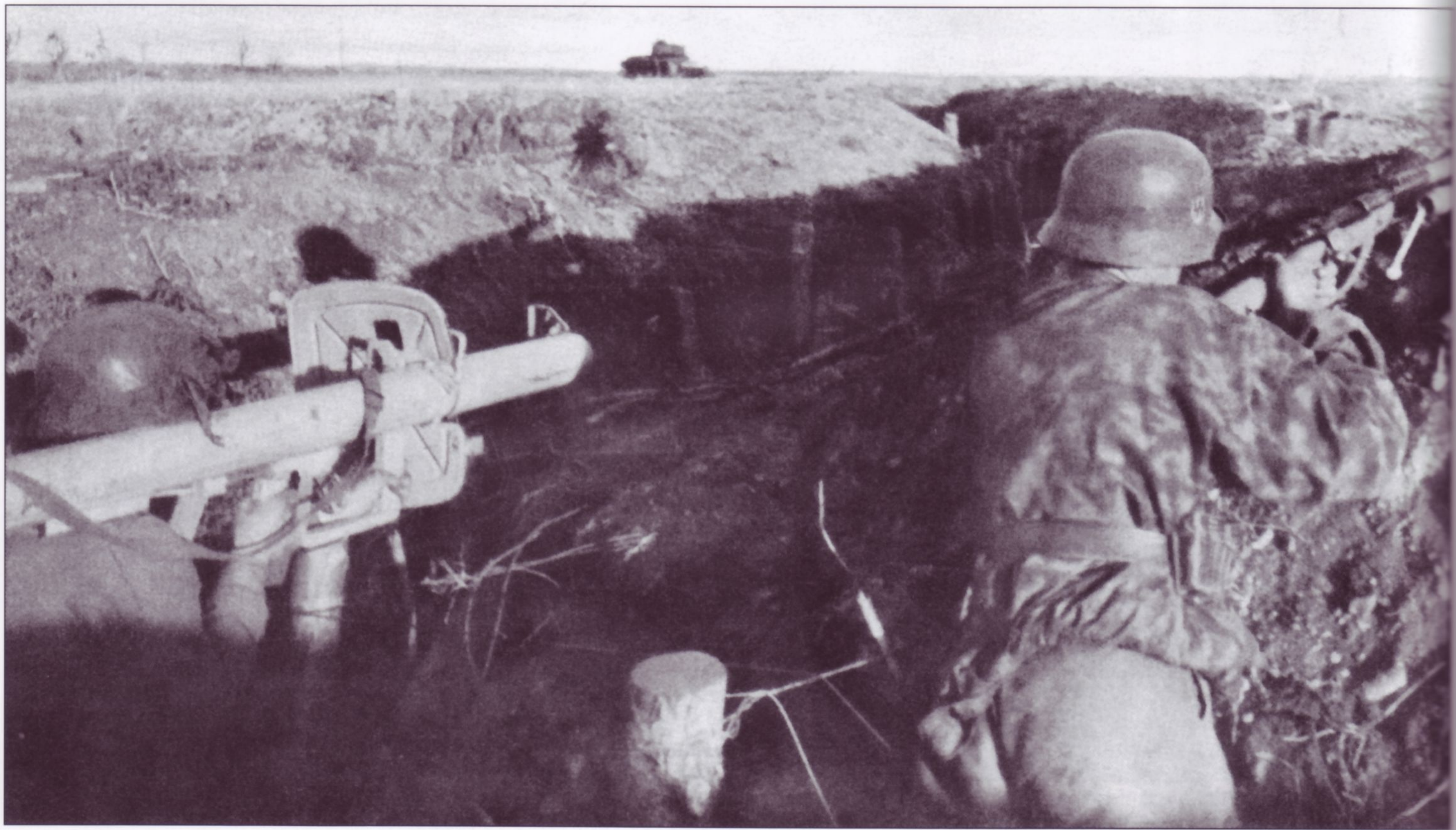


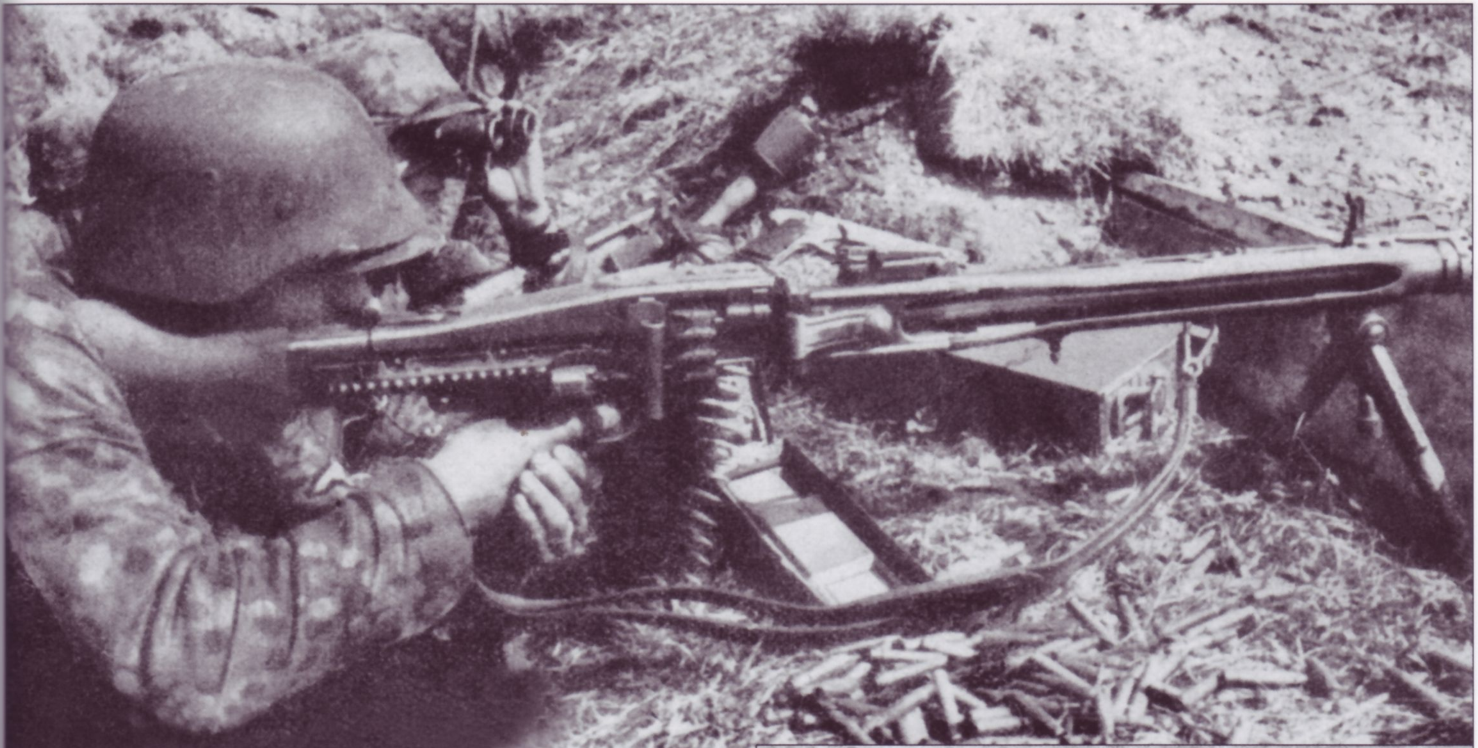
An MG34 light machine team mans its weapon in a well-constructed horseshoe position, which would allow a wide field of fire. The position is revetted with planks held in place by heavy gauge wire. Several knocked-out Soviet T-34 tanks can be seen over their shoulders.



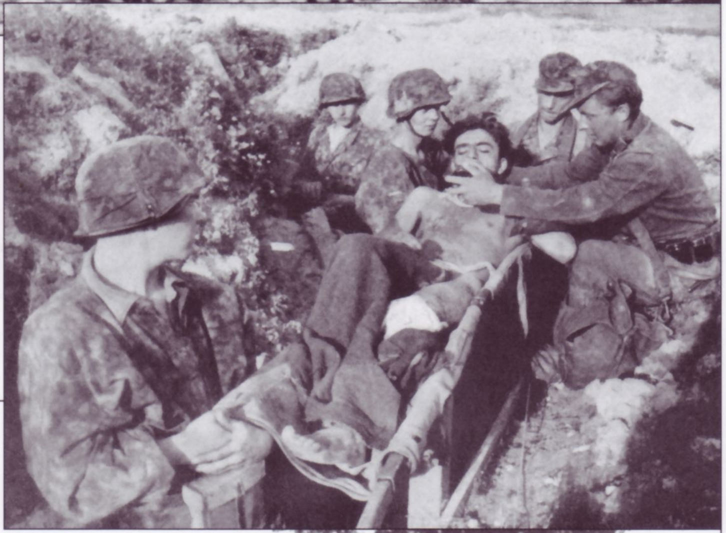
A Waffen-SS rifleman in action wearing full combat gear: bread bag on right hip, gas mask case on right side, mess kit on left hip, water bottle and entrenching tool on left side. More commonly the water bottle was carried over the bread bag. He carries the Mauser 7.92mm Kar98k, the standard German infantry rifle, although the Waffen-SS was frequently armed with rifles of foreign origin.

An 8.8cm RP54 crew prepares to engage a tank. Variously known as the Raketenpanzerbüchse (armor-buster rocket), Panzerschreck (armor terror) or Ofenrohr (stovepipe), this weapon proved to be effective against tanks and was issued in large numbers to regimental tank destroyer companies. Note the Stg24 stick hand grenades to the upper right beside the rifle with their end caps removed and their pull cords dangling ready for immediate use.

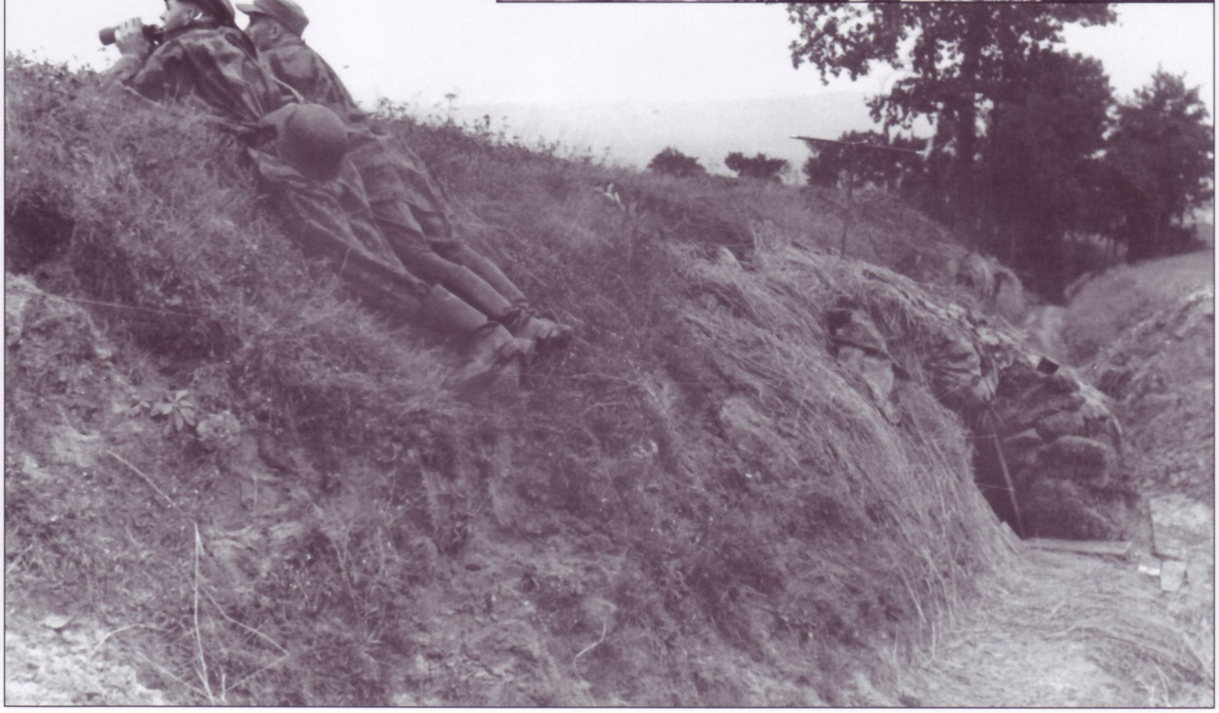




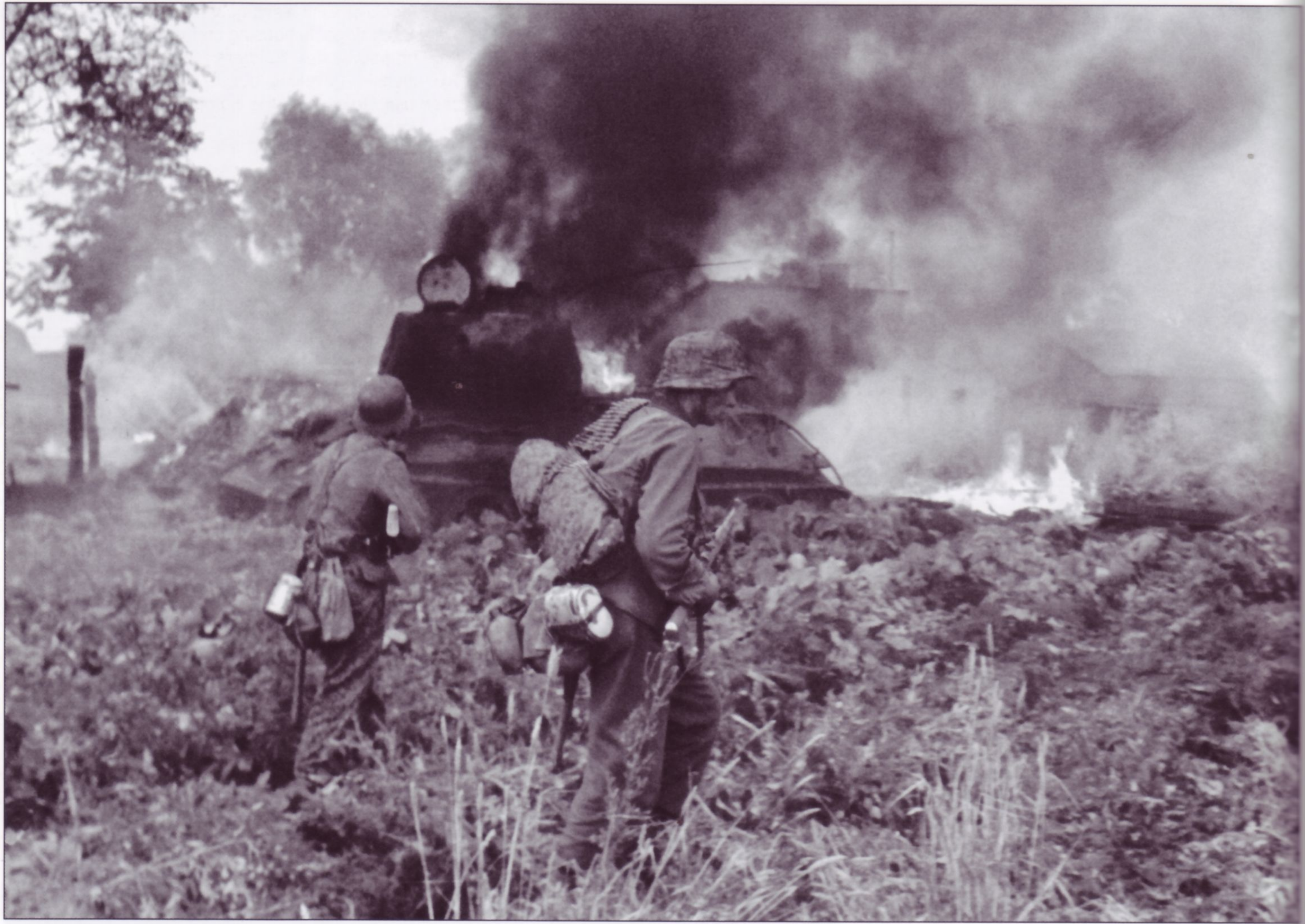
An MG42 light machine-gun team engages an attacking enemy from a horseshoe position. The MG34 had of fire of 800-900 rounds per minute while the MG42 fired 1,100-1,200 rounds per minute. The 300-round ammunition containers can be seen beside the MG42, which German soldiers sometimes called the "Hitlersäge" (Hitler's saw).



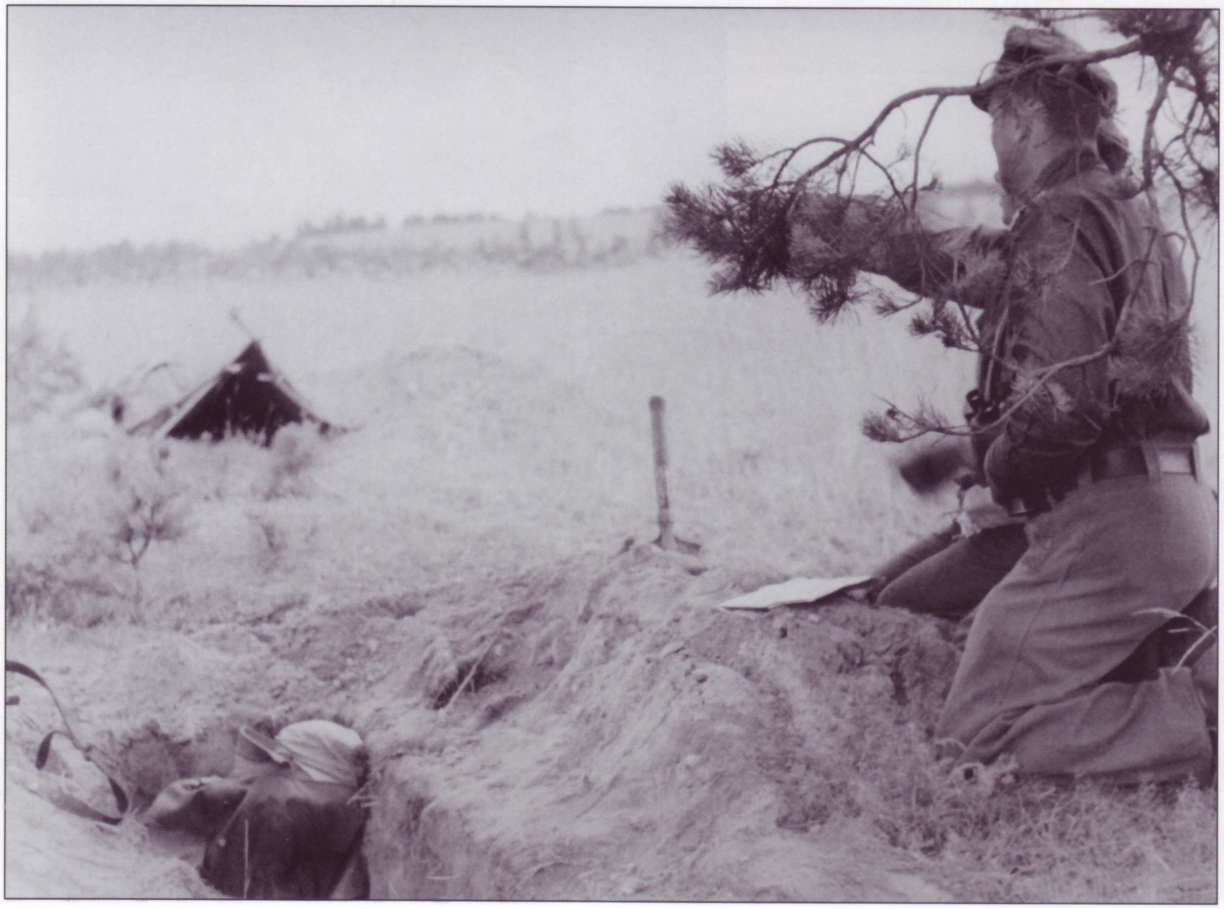
A wounded soldier is carried through the trenches back to the aid station on a folding litter. German trenches were narrow to provide as much protection as possible from air-bursting artillery rounds and air attack. This made it difficult to transport litters, especially when making tight turns. The foremost man has a machine-gun spare parts case on his belt.



Two soldiers keep watch for the enemy in southern Poland. Their camouflaged dugout can be seen in the forward side of the ravine they use for shelter. They appear to be wearing Army camouflage pattern Zeltbahnen.



Waffen-SS assault troops advance past a burning T-34/85 tank. They wear typical combat equipment, while the foremost rifleman carries a belt of ammunition of his group's light machine-gun.

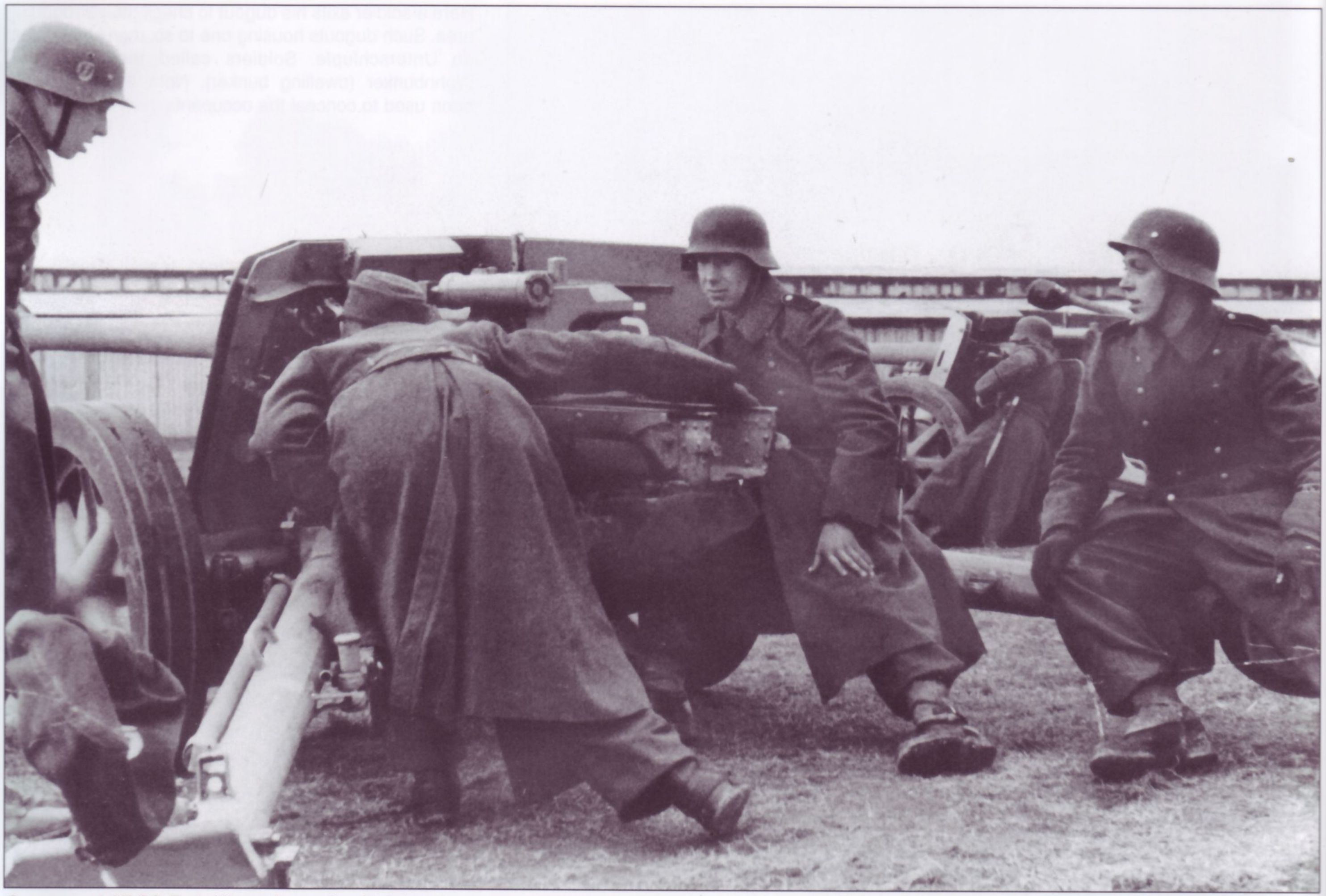


Near Warsaw in the summer of 1944, soldiers dig slit trenches, which they called a Wolfsgrabhügel (wolf's barrow). In the background is a simple shelter made from a Zeltbahn.

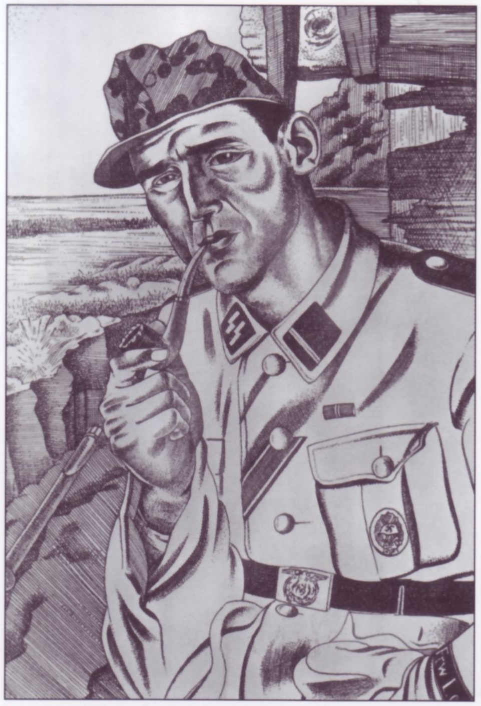
Here a soldier exits his dugout to check the surrounding area. Such dugouts housing one to six men were called an Unterschlupfe. Soldiers called them simply a Wohnbunker (dwelling bunker). Note that straw has been used to conceal the occupants' rucksacks.

Near Warsaw, Poland, an SS-Sturmmann, identifiable by the single inverted chevron on the left sleeve, cautiously advances through pinewoods. The Germans employed three-man patrols to reconnoiter routes for larger units before advancing. Two of the men would lead, keeping several meters apart, while the third man followed some distance to the rear in order for him to survive any ambush and thus be able to report back to his parent unit.

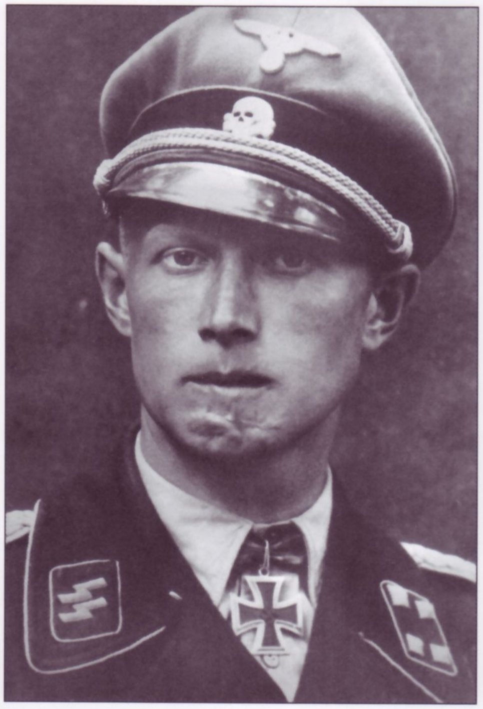
NCOs study the terrain and distant tree line before advancing across the open ground. By this time there were very few junior officers available to command platoons; more often than not, they were led by experienced NCOs.



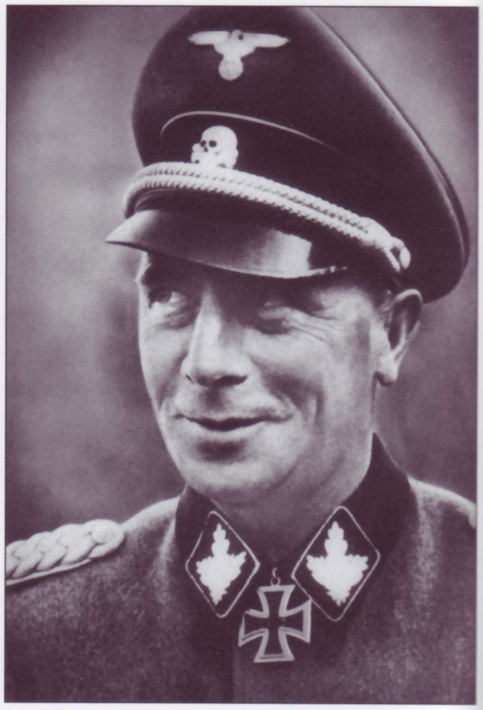
Gunners of 27.SS-Freiwilligen-Grenadier-Division "Langemarck" training in Germany, 1944. They were eventually shipped-out to the Ostfront, where the division took part in combat operations in Pommerania, Poland.



A "trench art" rendition of a battle experienced SS-Sturmmann of SS-Legion "Flandern". He wears a Wound Badge on his left breast pocket, and the silver-on-black "Langemarck" cuff band and emblem on the left sleeve. This consisted of a rampant lion in black, on a yellow shield. The legion was later re-formed to create 27.SS-Freiwilligen-Grenadier-Division "Langemarck".



Knight's Cross winner SS-Sturmbannführer Christian Tychsen won the award in March 1943 while commanding II. Abteilung, SS-Panzer-Regiment 2 of SS-Panzergrenadier-Division "Das Reich". He later received the Oak Leaves to the Knight's Cross, fighting the British as commander of SS-Panzer-Regiment 2. He was killed-in-action in Normandy during July of 1944.



SS-Brigadeführer Wilhelm "Willi" Bittrich won his fame as commander of II.SS-Panzerkorps fighting against British in Arnhem in September 1944. He had previously commanded SS-Standarte "Deutschland" of SS-Division "Das Reich". It is thought that Bittrich was the last German officer to be decorated with the Swords of the Knight's Cross on 6 May 1945.

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